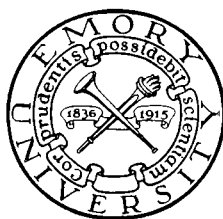


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# M A D.

## *A STORY OF DUST AND ASHES.*

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "BENT, NOT BROKEN," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# M A D.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE BREAKING OF A BARRIER.

It was about this time that Aunt Fanny, in the large room at Surrey-street, took to complaining of her neck, and wore a narrow strip of flannel beneath the stiff white-muslin kerchief, while night and morn her servant had to rub the said neck with hartshorn and oil. And truly the old dame's neck was stiff, and cold might have had some share in producing the stiffness; but undoubtedly it was principally caused by the many sage shakes she gave her head when pondering over her nephew's state; for in spite of all the medicaments which he patiently allowed her to admin-

ister, the old lady effected no cure, and was in consequence sorely troubled in her own mind.

But she was not so sorely troubled as the object of her interest, who angered himself in vain because of the chaotic state of his mind. Battle, battle—ever the same useless struggle, till he was ashamed of his weakness and want of self-control. To-day victor, to-morrow vanquished; now reviling himself for his want of faith and cruel suspicions, which he owned were almost baseless; the next day a slave to duty, and forbidding his heart to harbour further thoughts of her he now called his enemy. Work seemed the only refuge, and he toiled on. Study he could not; but he visited from house to house in the fold of Bennett's-rents, where the tainted sheep of his flock were gathered; and hiding from himself his real feelings—a shallow pretence—he knew the while how anxious he was respecting that little ewe-lamb.

But he drew a mask over his face, telling himself it was his true countenance; and with a calmness that was but on the surface, he called frequently to see the invalid mother, timing,

however, his visits that they might be made while Lucy was absent—for duty's sake (and he now knew pretty well when she was likely to visit the warehouse); while, when he had visited the Rents, and returned without seeing her, he credited duty largely, and praised his own self-denial. All steps, he flattered himself, towards the final conquest which he would achieve; but though casting out the weak thoughts, he told himself that it was his duty to satisfy his heart concerning the doubts which so constantly tormented him.

How often the hours came when he scorned his dissimulation, and tore off the mask, none knew; but his face grew more pale and livid, and the gray hairs that sprinkled his temples were thicker than of old.

It happened one day, though, when he and Lucy had not encountered since he saw her bending over the child from Mrs. Jarker's room, that, visiting from house to house and room to room, Mr. Sterne stood in front of Mrs. Sims'; but that lady was from home; so hearing the merry voice

of the laughing child, he had ascended the stairs to find Lucy in the birdcatcher's attic. For the little face had been pressed against the blackened window, and a pair of bright little eyes had peered, hour after hour, from beneath the tangled golden hair, watching the busy fingers at the sewing-machine, till with heart aching for the neglected babe, and to study her mother, who objected to its being brought into the room, Lucy had crossed the court, and gone up and played with the little thing, laughing merrily at the child's delight, though a tear stood in her eye more than once as she evaded the child's eager, oft-repeated question of "When mammy come back?" Bill had gone out with his nets, and most probably would not be back until night; so the child had been left alone with some food in the dreary room, to play or cry itself to sleep, unless Mrs. Sims should be there to attend to its wants. But there was that one spot by the window where she could look down upon Lucy; and there, day after day, she would stand without murmuring, attracted by that wondrous sense which draws children to the love-

able and true. Lucy's heart yearned as she gazed up from time to time at the child, and she longed earnestly for the season when its mother should make fresh arrangements; but for some reason she came not, and Lucy had not seen her since Mrs. Jarker's death.

And now the golden hours for which the little soul had longed had come again. Lucy was with her, and, herself a child for the time, she laughed merrily at the little one's delight.

Panting, tumbled, and flushed with exercise, Lucy stood at last, returning an escaped curl to its bondage, a bright smile playing round her ruddy lips, which parted to display the white teeth beneath, when the door opened, and, with a frown upon his brow, the curate stood in the entrance gazing upon the scene before him.

"In that ruffian's room—there of all places in the world!" doubt whispered to him; at a time, too, when their chance meetings had been attended by a cold reserve on Lucy's part—a reserve which his doubting heart misinterpreted; for he could not in his blindness see the cost at

which it was maintained. And yet this reserve had pleased him while it pained, for he at times acknowledged the interest he took in her welfare. But it mattered not, he said, for his desire was but to try and save her from evil, nothing more; and the oftener he listened to these delusive whisperings the stronger grew a voice within, telling him that his reasoning was false, and that he was forgetting duty, position—all, in a love for one who grew colder and more distant at every meeting. Wearily, though, he kept on building up a wall between them—a wall built upon the sand. Stone by stone he laid, telling himself that it was for duty's sake, as he toiled on helplessly at his self-imposed task. True, he might have satisfied himself of the motive for Lucy's actions, which to him wore a blurred and strange aspect; but to others her name seemed a sealed book, one which he shrank from opening, lest he should at the same time reveal the secret of his own heart.

And now he stood at the door of that beggarly room, where was the bed over which he had so lately bent to whisper comfort to the suffering

woman, or knelt by its side to ask mercy for the poor sufferer and a blessing on the helpless child. There was the same bare look of misery in the wretched place; but as the sun streamed through the great leaden lattice, all seemed glorified and brightened by the presence there. Unseen he gazed on, while the glow of orange light flooded the room, and played round the graceful form of Lucy, as, starting again, she was pursued by the laughing child, varying her attitude each moment as she eluded its grasp.

Suddenly the child struck itself sharply against a chair, and broke into a whimpering cry; but the caressing arms, the words of endearment, and the loving kiss soothed the pain instantly, and a smile came over the sunny face once more; when Lucy stood as if transfixed, the merry light faded from her eyes, the smile from her lip, and then the blood flushed to her temples, but only to retreat and leave her deadly pale, for in an instant the wall so laboriously built up, and at so great a cost in suffering, was swept down by the flood of passion. Arthur Sterne knew that the



battle had been in vain, and that he was but man; while doubt, everything, was cast to the winds as he was by her side, her hands clasped in his, telling her of his beaten-down love, his hopes, his fears,—all, all in the impassioned burst of words raised by the tempest of a strong man's love; for the sandy foundation was undermined, and the last trace of the barrier swept away.

And what said she? No words came in reply to his appeal. At first, startled, confused, overcome, she shrank from him, pale and trembling; but as his words came pouring forth, making cheek and neck burn, she knew that no greater bliss could be hers; and the trembling lids of her dark-blue eyes were slowly lifted to meet his, when, as if scathing her once more, came the recollection of his bitter, contemptuous look, his long coldness, and even scorn; and snatching away her hands, she burst into tears and darted from the room.

Pale and troubled in mind as to what to attribute Lucy's behaviour, his brain in a whirl of

doubt, Arthur Sterne stood gazing at the door, until, turning, he became aware that the opposite attic window was being opened. The lark began to twitter as the hand of Jean Marais secured it outside ; and then he saw the wild dark eyes of the youth begin to earnestly watch the room.

Turning with a few kind words to the astonished child, who crouched in a corner, Arthur Sterne made his way from the house ; and a sad evening spent Aunt Fanny, in her anxiety for the “ wilful boy ” who angrily rejected her advice. He was not ill, he said ; but the good dame nipped her lips together ; while, retiring at last, the curate spent the night pacing his chamber-floor, trying to examine the tangle in his heart, but only to conclude that, come what might, difference of position should be no bar between him and Lucy ; for, driving away, as he thought successfully, the doubt that still assailed him, he declared to himself that she possessed virtues before which birth and dowry paled and became as naught.

“ Unstable as water,” muttered the curate to

himself, though, days after, when meeting with Lucy alone in the front-room of their place in Bennett's-rents, the barrier was again broken down—the barrier that time had forced him to renew—while the words he could not but utter came pouring forth, to bring no response.

Septimus was away with his boy, and Mrs. Hardon slept in the back-room; and the words of Arthur Sterne were low and deep as the passion that prompted them. But there was no response—no loving look in reply—naught but the pale cheek and quivering eyelid, tears and looks of half-anger; for still clung to Lucy the recollection of his scorn and contempt, his misinterpretation of her motives; and the hands he clasped were cold and drawn away.

Then anger took the place of love—a foolish, mad anger, which robbed him of his self-control, and made him utter words beneath whose passion the poor girl bent as bends flower before the storm. He uttered words then that an hour after he would have given anything to recall; telling her angrily of *ma mère* and her slighting hints,

of Jarker's familiarity, and lastly of the meeting he had witnessed in the Lane; unheeding the hands held up so deprecatingly, the appealing looks, and the tear-wet, pallid cheeks; for, as he told himself again and again that night, he was mad—mad in his passionate love for one unworthy—mad in his words; and he writhed as he recalled the way in which he felt that he had lowered himself.

“I insist—I hold it as a right!” he had exclaimed; “tell me, Lucy, who was that woman? Do you know her character?” And he clutched her wrist angrily as he spoke.

He said no more then, for Lucy's face was aflame, and she started hastily to her feet, facing him almost as it were at bay, and vainly trying to free her hand from his grasp.

“Do your parents know of your meetings?” he exclaimed.

“No, no, no!” she cried excitedly, as she glanced towards the back-room door.

“Then I must—nay,” he added with almost a cowardly look of triumph, for the weakness of the

man was triumphant that afternoon, and he yielded to all that he had hitherto triumphed over—"I will tell them," he said, "for your good."

"For pity's sake," whispered Lucy, "Mr. Sterne. Ah, pray, sir, stop—pray stay! Do not think ill of me—"

But there Lucy ceased, for she was alone; and once more scornfully, with the cold bitter look, Mr. Sterne had dashed her hand from him in contempt and turned from the room, into which Mrs. Hardon now came to find Lucy weeping as though her heart would break.

## CHAPTER II.

### SNUFF.

OLD MATT did not wake again for many hours, but, as the days slipped by, he partook with avidity of all that was allowed him, and grumbled for more. His friend the house-surgeon, whom he could look at now without imagining that he took notes inimical to his friend Septimus Hardon's interest, reported favourably of his condition; while Septimus himself came again and again, each time more eager to get at that which was hidden by the confusion in old Matt's brain.

“ If he had only been so jolly anxious about the Somesham affair, first start off, what a difference it would have made!” grumbled Matt.

But it seemed useless to try and draw the old man's attention to things he had talked of

in the days shortly before his entry of the hospital, for here all seemed blank.

“ Well, yes, sir,” Matt would say, “ I have some faint recollection of saying something about medicine and attendance ; but do you know, sir, I begin to think that one’s memory is in one’s blood ? and they took so much out of me that last time, that I can’t remember anything at all. ‘ Medicine and attendance,’ did I say ? Why, it must have been the medicine and attendance here, and those old cats of nurses. My thinking apparatus is terribly out of order, sir ; and when I try to look back at anything, it’s like peeping at it through a dirty window. P’r’aps it won’t come bright and clean again, eh ? ”

“ Don’t try to think,” said Septimus with a sigh. “ You will recollect some day ; so let it rest.”

“ Well, sir, that’s just what I should like to do ; but since you’ve asked me, I can’t ; for things won’t go just as I like, and I feel all in a muddle. Let’s see, now : you said something about this at your last visit, didn’t you, sir ? when I asked

you about that talking woman and the office for servants ; for I do recollect that, you know."

"Yes," replied Septimus, "at every visit."

"Just so," said Matt ; "I thought you did ; but I can't tell a bit about it now. Sometimes it seems that I heard it ; sometimes that I read it, or saw it against a wall, or dancing before my eyes ; but let's see," he said vacantly, as he held his hand to his head, "what was it we wanted to find ?"

"The doctor's books, or the doctor," said Septimus.

"To be sure," said the old man ; "I haven't got it right yet ; and really you know, sir, this isn't a first-class place to get right in, and they won't part with me yet, though I do long now to be well, and at liberty for a peep at the old law-courts and Lincoln's-inn once more. I mean to have a holiday, and spend it among all the posts in the old square as soon as I'm out ; I'm getting so light-hearted and jolly, sir. Why, it will be quite a treat to be somewhere amongst a bit or two of dirt once more ; we're so clean here."



“Only a little longer, Matt,” said Septimus smiling.

“You see,” said Matt, “there’s so much to upset one about ; what with the screen round this bed, and the screen round that bed, and the groans and sighs, ah, and even shouts sometimes, there’s plenty to make a poor fellow feel low-spirited. Now there’s a chap over there in that bed seems to have taken it into his head that he suffers more than anyone who ever came into the place, and howls and goes on terribly ; while the bigger and stronger people are, sir, the more weak they seem to me to be in bearing pain. I believe, after all, you know, sir, that the little weak women beat us hollow.”

“Ah !” said the patient spoken of, surmising from Matt’s gestures that he was being referred to—“ah ! Mr. Space, you are talking about me, sir, and my groans, and it’s very hard and unfeeling, sir. You may suffer yourself some day.”

The visitor felt uncomfortable ; but old Matt took it up directly.

“That’s cool, anyhow,” he gasped ; “why,

what do you mean? haven't I suffered as much as any of you, and been through two operations, and lived 'em out too? Why, what more would you have? It would have killed a big fellow like you, I know."

The patient replied with a groan, and began muttering about the unfeeling behaviour of those about him, from whom, he said, he had expected a little sympathy.

This roused the ire of a neighbour who had lost a leg through being run over by a coal-wagon, and he now took up the matter, followed by several others; so that a wordy warfare seemed imminent.

"That's it, go on," growled Matt in an undertone. "They're all getting better, sir; and, consequently, they're as cross as two sticks. What a thing it is! There seems to be no gratitude amongst them; and really, sir, if it wasn't for the nurses, it wouldn't be such a bad place to come to—that is, for a man with strong nerves, you know. Now just look at 'em, how they are going it!"

The murmurings and dissensions of the other patients seemed to have quite a good effect upon old Matt, who forgot his own pains in the troubles of those around him.

“You don’t know how much longer you will be here?” said Septimus.

“Not for certain, sir; but I think only for a few more days. But it’s wonderful what a difference they have made in me. I mean to go in for a fortune, sir, as soon as I’m out; and then I shall make my will, and leave half to the hospital. Now I’ve got the worst of it all over, I amuse myself with taking a bit of notice of what goes on around me, and listening to what’s said; and it’s wonderful what an amount of misery comes into this place—wonderful. I’ve known of more trouble since I’ve been in here, sir, than I should have thought there had been in the whole of London; and that’s saying no little, sir. Lots die, you know; but then see how many they send out cured. I don’t see all, but one hears so much from the talking of the nurses. I expected when I came here that there would

be plenty of accidents, broken bones—legs, arms, and ribs, and so on; but there, bless you, the place is full of it; and they're getting to such a wonderful pitch now, with their doctoring and surgery, that they'll be making a new man next, out of the odd bits they always have on hand here."

"I suppose so," said Septimus drily.

"Ah, you may laugh, sir," said Matt; "but it's wonderful to what a pitch surgery has got. Now, for instance, just fancy—"

"There," cried Septimus, "pray stop, or I must leave you. I fancy quite enough involuntarily, without wishing to hear fresh horrors. It's bad enough having to come into the place."

"Lor' bless you, sir," said Matt, "you should listen to the nurses, when one of 'em happens to be in a good humour. Do you know when that is, sir?"

"When pleased, I suppose," said Septimus.

"Just so, sir; the very time. And when do you suppose that last is?"

Septimus shook his head.

“ You don’t know, of course, sir. Why, when the patients are getting better.”

“ I might have supposed that,” said Septimus wearily.

The old man chuckled, and looked brighter than he had looked for weeks. “ Yes,” he said, “ it’s when the patients are getting better, and there’s plenty of port-wine and gin on the way. That’s the time to find the nurse in a good humour ; and she’ll tell you anything, or do anything for you.”

Septimus Hardon looked weary and anxious, and fidgeted in his chair, as if he longed to change the conversation, but the garrulous old man kept on.

“ Tell you what, sir, these nurses seem to get their hearts hardened and crusted over ; and then when you give them a little alcohol, as the teetotallers call it, the crust gets softened a bit, and things go better. I used to growl and go on terribly at first ; but it’s no use to swim against the stream. I used to grumble when I found that they drunk half my wine and watered

my gin ; but I'm used to that sort of thing now : for which is best—to drink all one's liquor, or keep friends with the nurse ? Last's best ; and they say I'm a dear patient old creature. I look it too, don't I ?" said the old man with a grim smile.

"But," said Septimus, "I must soon go ; and I should like a word or two about my affairs first."

"All right, sir ; we'll come to that directly. I'm an invalid, and you must humour me. But this is the way of it. My nurse comes to me, like an old foxey vixen as she is, and—'Now, my dear, how are we?' she says. 'Only middling, nurse,' I say. 'I've brought you a glass of wine to cheer you up,' she says. 'Don't care about it a bit,' I say ; 'don't feel wine-hungry.' 'O,' she says, 'but the doctor ordered it. Now, take it, like a good soul. You must want it.' 'Not half so bad as some people do,' I say. 'Toss it off, nurse ; and just punch my pillow up a bit, it's got hard and hot.' 'Bless my heart, no,' she says, 'I couldn't think of such a thing!' so

she sets the wine down, and puts my head a bit comfortable. ‘The wine’s for you; so, now, take it directly; I couldn’t touch it—I don’t care for wine.’

“Of course you don’t,” I say to myself; and then I begin to talk to her a bit, and to tell her that she must have a sad wearing life of it, when the old tabby sets up her back and purrs, and likes it all—looking the while as tigerish, and sleek, and clawey, as the old cats can look. Then I tell her she wants more support, and so on, when all at once she finds out that there’s some one else to attend upon, and I must drink my wine directly; so I take the glass and perhaps drink it; but more often I only just put it to my lips and set it back upon the tray, when she’s satisfied. Of course, you know, it would be instant dismissal for a nurse to drink a patient’s wine or spirits if it was known; but any thing left is different altogether. You know, sir, it’s a dreadfully beggarly way of going to work, only as the saying goes, you must fight some one we know of with his own weapons: and now we are

the very best of friends possible. You'd be surprised how we get along, and all through going without a glass now and then. The best of it is, though, that she never thinks of watering it now, like she would for another patient; so that what I miss in quantity I get in strength, and, you know, she'll do anything for me in a minute—that is, if she feels disposed.”

“But,” said Septimus, “it seems strange that you should be so left at the mercy of these women.”

“What can you do?” said the old man.—“There, I’ve just done, sir, and we’ll go into that directly.—Who can you get to go through what these women do, unless it’s these Sisters of Mercy, who many say are to become general? Suppose there was a strike, eh? Look how few people you can get to come and run the risk of fevers and all sorts of diseases. Sisters of Mercy, eh? God bless them for it then, if they will; but I hope I may never want their help, all the same. But there, we won’t talk about it, only you want iron women a’most to go through it all, and it’s not a life to be envied. Why, if it ain’t almost



leaving-time, sir, and you've kept me chatting about my affairs here, and yours are nowhere. How are you getting on?"

"Badly, Matt, badly. But I've very little to say, Matt, for I was unable to get on without you," replied Septimus, smiling at the old man's coolness.

"'Spose so," said Matt laconically; "let's see, sir, I think you never went any more to Finsbury?"

"Where was the use," said Septimus drearily; "who can tell where a day-book fifty years old can be?"

"True," said the old man thoughtfully; "butter-shop, most likely; and it wouldn't pay to go all over London buying half-pounds of 'best Dorset,' on the chance of getting the right sheet. I can't see it yet, sir; and still I seem to fancy we shall do it, though everything about it seems to be all in a muddle."

Septimus Hardon seemed to be of the same opinion, for he sighed, took his hat, and went homeward in a frame of mind that made him feel

disposed to bury the past and its cares, and look only to the future; while old Matt picked up a newspaper, and began mechanically folding it into small squares—butter-shop size.

“No,” he muttered, “not much chance of finding that particular scrap of paper, if we don’t get hold of the book through the old doctor’s heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns. And that’s where we ought to begin; putting ads. in the *Times*, and setting private inquirers to work, and all on to that tune; only, to play that tune, sir, you want money. Some careless hussy has burnt that scrap of paper, sir, long ago, to light a fire; or it has been used for twisting-up screws of tobacco, or ha’porths of toffee, or hundreds of other things as some beggarly shop or another is licensed to deal in. Only fancy someone lighting his pipe with that valuable little scrap of paper! ‘Medicine and attendance, Mrs. Hardon, two, twelve, six!’ I’ll be bound to say that was the figure, and I’d give something to get hold of that bit. Wonder whether it’s selfishness, and thinking of what it would be worth to

me? S'pose so; for this is a rum world, and I'm no better than I should be. But who'd ever have thought this would have come out of my going to his office and asking for a job? Don't matter, though, about what I feel, for he'd have come to see me here safe enough, even if it had not been about his affairs; for he's a trump, sir, a trump: but all the same, it's a pity he ain't got more in him—worldly stuff, you know."

Old Matt sat very thoughtfully for awhile, and then began to mutter again.

"Wish I had a pinch of snuff once more. There now; I'm blest. Only to think of that! me having my box in my pocket, and to forget all about it—shows what my head's worth now. Bravo! though; that seems to clear one's head wonderfully. I shall recommend its use in lunatic asylums for mental diseases; fine thing, I believe. Only to think, though, for me to get that into my head about that entry I had seen, and trying to write it down, and then for it to be clean gone once more! S'pose I did think of something of the kind, or see it, or something. Heigho!" he

sighed ; “ I must have been precious bad though, sir, confoundedly bad. Thank goodness it’s all over, though, for this time ; and I’m going to walk out soon, instead of, as I expected, being taken to the students’ lodgings in small pieces, wrapped up in paper—paper—waste-paper—by jingo ! though, I’ll have a go at the waste-paper everywhere. I’ll search every waste-paper shop in London, beginning at Mother Slagg’s—beg her pardon, Gross by this time I suppose, and—and—hooray ! ” he shouted wildly, to the intense astonishment of the fellow-patients, as he tossed his newspaper in the air. “ Snuff for ever ! that pinch did it. Only let me get out of this place. At last ! ”

## CHAPTER III.

### MR. JARKER'S TRAITS.

MEN of business cannot afford to continue their grief for any length of time, hence at a very short date after the death of his wife, Mr. William Jarker, birdfancier, birdcatcher, and pigeon-trapper, to be heard of at any time at the Blue Posts, Hemlock-court, by such gents as wanted a few dozen of blue-rocks or sparrows for the next trap-match at Wormwood Scrubbs, stood before a piece of looking-glass nailed to the wall of his room with three tin-tacks, a ragged, three-cornered, wavy-looking scrap, from which, if a little more of the quicksilver had been rubbed off, it would never again have been guilty of distorting the human face divine. Upon this occasion it played strange pranks with the expressive countenance of Mr.

Jarker, as he stood, with oily fingers, giving the required gloss and under-turn to his side-locks, which were of the true "Newgate-knocker" pattern, their length denoting how long a time Mr. Jarker had been running fancy free without troubling her Majesty's officials for his daily rations and lodging, in return for which he would scrub, polish, and clean to order. Mr. Jarker seemed to take extra pains over his toilet, arranging his neck-tie and the silver-mounted lens, buttoning-up his red-plush waistcoat with the fustian back and sleeves, cleaning his finger-nails with the broken-out tooth of a comb, before he stood in front of the glass and smirked at himself.

Now this was a mistake on Mr. Jarker's part, for his was a style of countenance that would not bear a smirking; there was too much stiffness of contour in the various features, a blunt angularity which resisted the softening sweetness of a smirky smile, and the consequence was, that if he had smirked at a stranger, the said stranger would have flinched, from a very strong impression that Mr. Jarker was rabid and about to bite. However, mistaken

or not, Mr. Jarker smirked several times, and after various patterns, before he frowned, which gave a much more respectable cast to his countenance, the scowl being most thoroughly in harmony. Mr. Jarker frowned, for one of the side-locks would not keep in position and retain the required bend when he had crowned himself with his slouchy fur-cap ; so the erring hair had to be again oiled, combed, and wetted with a solution of brown sugar, which the operator moistened in a natural way in the palms of his hands, then the lock was smoothed and tucked under, and proved a fixture ; and now the cap was again placed in position, and displayed a thin wisp of crape fastened round it by means of a piece of string ; for being a soldier engaged in the battle of life, Mr. Jarker did not doff his uniform, but confined himself to the above slight manifestation of the fact that he was a widower.

Apparently satisfied with his aspect, which was a little more villanous than usual, Mr. Jarker turned his attention to the child, who crouched in a corner of the room with a piece of bread in her

hand, watching him with her large blue eyes, very round and staring, but evidently pressing her little self as far away from the fellow as possible.

“Ah ! and so she comes and plays with the kid when I’m out, does she ?” said Mr. Jarker, in a ruminating tone. “Ah ! we knows what that means, my chicking, don’t we ?”

The little thing pressed herself closer to the wall, and Mr. Jarker stood very thoughtfully at the window for a few minutes, gazing down at where Lucy’s sewing-machine beat rapidly ; but Mr. Jarker was not aware that in his turn Jean Marais was watching him fiercely, his dark eyes seeming to flash beneath his overhanging pent-house brows, as he eagerly scanned every motion of the ruffian, looking the while as if prepared to spring across the court at his throat.

“Ah ! we knows what that means, don’t we, my chicking ?” repeated Mr. Jarker, turning once more from the window. “Come here to yer daddy, d’yer hear !”

But though hearing plainly enough, the little thing only shrank back closer into her corner ;



when, with an oath, the fellow took two steps forward and seized the little thing by its pinky shelly ear, and dragged it, whimpering and trembling, into the middle of the attic, where he made "an offer" at it as if to strike, but the frailty and helplessness of the little one disarmed even him, and as his eyes wandered to the window to see that no opposite neighbour could watch them where they stood, his arm fell to his side as he sat down.

"Now, then!" cried Mr. Jarker, "no pipin'; don't you try none of them games with me, my young warmin'. 'Cos why, it's ware hawks to yer if yer does. Now hook it back to that there corner."

The child's eyes were turned timidly and wonderingly up to his, as it shrank back once more to the corner of the attic.

"Now, then!" cried Jarker sharply, "come here again."

Like an obedient dog in the course of training, the little thing crept back to his side, and then the tiny face grew more wondering and timid, the

eyes more round, and it was very evident that the little brain, soft, plastic, and ready to receive any impression, was working hard to understand the meaning of the ruffian's words. Bright and beautiful as the faces shown to us on canvas as those of angels, the little countenance, shining the brighter for the squalor around, was turned up more and more towards Jarker, gazing so fixedly and earnestly at him that he grew uneasy, fidgeted and shuffled his feet, and then his eyes sank, guilt cowering before innocence; for, quite disconcerted by the long, steady gaze, the ruffian rose and turned away, growling and muttering, "She's gallus deep for such a little un." He then took a short peep at his pigeons, walked back to the window, and stared long and heavily at the white hands he could see busy at the sewing-machine, and then turned once more to the wondering atom, trying to soften himself as he stooped down, but the child only flinched as from a coming blow when he patted the soft, bright curls.

"Here, come here," he said gently, and he drew the child between his knees as he sat down.

“Now mind this here: nex’ time she comes and plays with you, my chickin’, perhaps she’ll say, ‘Would you like me to be your new mammy?’ she’ll say; and then, ‘Yes,’ says you; d’yer hear? ‘yes,’ says you. Now say it.”

But the little one only continued her wondering gaze till the fellow left her, and slouched out of the room, after raking the last cinder from the fire, in performing which he knocked the bottom of the grate from its frail hold, and then, in his endeavours to replace it, burned his fingers, and ejaculated so loudly that the eyes of the child were turned upon him more wonderingly than ever.

And then—was it that sympathy for the child moved the inmate of the opposite attic, or that he had a natural hatred for Jarker? Jean turned angrily from the window to a cage of half-a-dozen linnets the fellow had brought him an hour or two before, and to his mother’s rage and astonishment, seemed about to wreak his fury upon the birds. He seized one in his hand, and was about to wring its neck, but *ma mère* leaped forward to stay him, when his fierce gesture sent her back to her seat to watch

him. But he did not kill the birds, but carried the cage to the window, and then let them go, one by one, till the last bird hesitated at the wire door for a few moments, and then fled, with a wild chirp of joy, far away into the smoky air.

“Jean, Jean ! but you are *bête—fou !*” exclaimed his mother, trembling with fear and rage at this folly, as she thought of the money he had given for the birds.

“I hate him, I hate him !” hissed Jean furiously, while, watching him through her closed eyes, the old woman nodded quickly to herself, as she muttered and thought of her own early days, and it seemed to her that Jean’s heart was as easy to read as that printed book at his side.

But at this time Mr. Jarker was slouching out of his room, and shouldering his way down the stairs, stopping the blowing of Mrs. Sims’ fire for an instant, as he growled audibly in passing ; then down into the court, where the index fingers of his hands were thrust into his mouth, and he was about to make a long and piercing whistle for the delectation of some passing pigeons as they

flew over the strip of heaven seen from the flags of the court; but a glance at the first-floor window where dwelt the Hardons checked him. The next minute, though, the birds repassed, and Bill whistled loudly again and again; but the birds would not listen to this shrill voice of the charmer, so the charmer himself, side-locks and all, went and stood at the bottom of the court, against the bright blue gilt-lettered boards of the public, where he rubbed the shoulders of his sleeve-waistcoat shiny, as he stood slouching about, and sucking one end of his spotted necktie.

“Whatcher going to stand, Bill?” said a gentleman of his acquaintance, a gentleman with a voice singularly like one that had been heard in the old Grange at Somesham upon a memorable night. This gentleman had a piece of straw in his mouth, and his hands in his pockets, his coiffure being of the same order as that of Mr. Jarker, while, being evidently of a terpsichorean turn of mind, he enlivened the street with a “pitter-patter, pitter-patter, pit-pit, pat,” toe-and-heel dance upon the cellar-flap of the public-

house, where, his boots being stout and well-nailed, and the flap very hollow beneath, his efforts were attended with so much noise that the potboy of the establishment thrust out a closely-cropped head between the swing doors, where he held it as if in the process of being shorn off, at the same time requesting the light-heeled gentleman to "Drop that 'ere now, come!"

But instead of standing anything to quench the thirst of the new-comer, Mr. Jarker stood upon the order of his going; for just then, laden with a large parcel of work, Lucy Grey passed out of the court and encountered Mr. Sterne, who saluted, and then turned with a grave, pained countenance to gaze after her, as he saw Jarker follow, slouching along as if his boots were soled with lead, diver fashion, and he of so ethereal a nature that the ponderous metal was necessary to prevent him from shooting up into heaven like a stickless rocket minus the tail of fire.

The curate turned thoughtfully up the court, and began his round of visits, listening to complaints here, supplications there, but finding no-

where rest. He went thoughtfully through his round of duties that day, hearing and speaking mechanically, for always before his eyes there was the light, graceful form of Lucy, followed by the hound-like Jarker, and as he thought the lines grew deeper and deeper in his forehead. He listened to Mrs. Sims' praises of the child—praises delivered in a lachrymose tone, as a strong odour of rum pervaded the place. He listened to *ma mère's* complaints of Jean, and felt an insinuation against her fellow-lodger's fair fame stab him as it were to the heart; while surprised he gazed upon the fury with which the son turned upon his mother; and then descending, his task nearly done, the curate sat by the bedside of Mrs. Hardon.

There stood the sewing-machine in the next room; there was the chair in which Lucy had been so lately seated, and where even now he could picture her form. But, silent and abstracted, he listened for the twentieth time to the story of the murmuring woman's troubles, and what she had suffered since they had been in

town. He listened, but he was asking himself the while whether Lucy merited the love he would pour at her feet—asking himself whether it was possible for a pure, fair, spotless lily to bloom amidst the pollution around. Still, too, came the remembrance of the words of the old Frenchwoman —“ Our beauty, some of us.” Once admitting doubt to his breast, the strange thoughts teemed in, bringing up the woman he had seen and tracked in vain, and above all the low ruffian whom he had seen dogging the fair girl’s footsteps but that very day, when love had whispered, “Follow!” and pride cried, “Nay, stand aloof!” for he recalled their last interview. Then, again, he asked himself how dared he believe words that slurred her fair fame, when his conscience whispered to him that they were like their source—vile ; but, surrounded as he was by vice and misery, might he not well wonder whether Lucy’s fair face spoke truth in its candour-tinged aspect, or was like the hundreds he encountered in his daily walks—fair to view, but with a canker within ?

He told himself that he could watch her no



longer—that he could not play the spy ; and once again he prayed for strength to conquer the passion that seemed to sway him at its will ; for he could not comprehend the behaviour of its object. Love he had thought to be buried for ever with his betrothed ; but from her grave the seed seemed to have returned to him untainted by time, and with all its quickening, germinating powers ready to shoot forth and blossom in a wealth of profusion for another. And he knew that it must be lavished upon Lucy, even though she still repulsed him. And now, again, his eye brightened as, dashing down the sinister thoughts, he would see only her faith and truth, smiling at poverty when he called up the riches of her heart—riches that he saw poured forth for the murmuring parent, for whose wants she toiled on incessantly, winning for her many a comfort that the sick woman could not else have enjoyed ; and even then with the overflowings of her young heart ready for the neglected child.

“For the neglected child !” What a gloomy starting-point for another train of thought, em-

bracing its mother, tall, dark, and rouge-cheeked ; Jarker, the ruffian, tracking Lucy's steps ; and lastly, *ma mère*, who seemed even then whispering in his ear, "Our beauty, some of us !" Arthur Sterne acknowledged that he was weak, though he fought hard with his soul-assailing enemies ; while the track of the storm he was encountering was marked in his face, as he strolled slowly homewards, but only to pause startled at the mouth of the court.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LUCY'S TROUBLE.

LUCY'S eyes turned very dim as soon as she had passed Mr. Sterne, and things wore a strangely blurred aspect. She would have given worlds to have thrown herself upon his breast, and told all —of Agnes Hardon and her sorrow, confided to her alone, as the suffering woman begged of her to love her for her child's sake, and not to turn upon her the cold bitter eyes of the world at large ; and again and again Lucy had taken the passive, wasted, tearful face of Agnes to her breast, in the rare and stealthy meetings they had had, and wept over her, little knowing that Agnes possessed a secret which she felt that she could not divulge for the sake of those

whom she had injured. Again and again Lucy had implored her leave to confide in Septimus Hardon, but Agnes had refused so firmly, telling her that the day her presence was betrayed would be that of their last meeting—telling her so angrily, but only to kneel at her feet the next moment, and ask her to bear for a little longer with an erring woman, whose stay in this world might not be for long. And so Lucy toiled on, bearing the scathing breath of calumny; pointed at by suspicion; and wounded again and again in her tenderest feelings by the only man she had ever felt that she could love. They were her own words, poor girl, though little had she seen of the world at large. She told herself that it was cruel of him to treat her as he did; but what could she do? And then she shivered as she thought of stolen meetings by night—meetings which should take place no more—while she wept bitterly as she hurried through the streets thinking of the misery of her lot.

She had no veil to her shabby bonnet, and it was only at last by a strong effort that she forced

back the tears ; for she felt that people were staring hard at her as she passed. But it was no unusual thing for people to look hard at Lucy Grey, while there was variety in those glances ; there were, from women, the glance of envy, the look of sisterly admiration, and that bordering upon motherly love ; and there were the hard stare from puppydom, the snobbish ogle, looks of love and respect, every glance that could dart from human eye ; but the poor girl hurried on as in a dream, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but bent upon the object of her journey. It was nothing to her that behind at a few yards' distance came Mr. William Jarker, favouring everyone with a fierce scowl in return for the glances bestowed upon her, as he tracked her with the pertinacity of a bloodhound, turning when she turned, crossing when she crossed. Once only on her way back did Lucy tremble, when a fiercely-bearded, middle-aged dandy half stopped in front of her, so that she was compelled to turn a little out of her path, as with a heightened colour her eyes sunk before the fellow's insulting

stare. But she did not hear his words, as, fervently wishing old Matt were by her side, she hurried on.

It sometimes happens, though, that those who are working for their own devices do us many a good turn; and it was so here, for as the studiously-dressed and bejewelled dandy turned and followed the fair girl, he suddenly became aware of a rough shoulder forcing him aside, when turning angrily, with umbrella raised to strike, he gazed full into the heavy, bull-dog countenance of Mr. Jarker, whose white teeth gleamed beneath his flattened nose as though he were preparing to fasten on his victim.

The next moment the lemon-gloved hands were covering chain and pin, and the heavy swell of the London current subsided slowly and disappeared, leaving Lucy unmolested as she hurried on, followed still closely by her self-constituted bodyguard, of whose presence she was ignorant; while, five minutes after, he made a side-bound into a doorway, where he stood peering round the post and smiling like some

hideous satyr of old, as Lucy encountered Agnes Hardon, and stopped in the quiet street where they then were.

The sight must have been very gratifying to Mr. Jarker, for he stood leering, and rubbing his soft, whitish hands, pausing every now and then to have a good gnaw at the nails, already nearly worn down to the quick; and then stepping lightly from his concealment, he passed close behind Agnes as she was whispering,

“God bless you! Don’t stay talking to me; go now. I’ll get it away directly he will let me. I have been five times already; but he was either there, or some one of his companions waiting about.”

Mr. Jarker gave a short, husky, forced cough as he passed, when, turning hastily, fear and anger seemed to combine in Agnes Hardon’s face, as she caught Lucy’s hands in her own, interposing herself, as if for protection, till Mr. Jarker had disappeared, when she hurried her away by another route, and hastily took her leave. But Lucy did not see her troubled, anxious face

following at a short distance, and keeping her in sight till she reached the end of the court in time to encounter Mr. Sterne, who saw almost at one glance Lucy, with Jarker standing aside to let her pass as he bestowed upon her a familiar smile and nod, and Agnes Hardon some fifty yards beyond, turning hastily and hurrying off; but her he followed angrily, and with a suffocating sensation at his breast, as if he were, knight-errant like, about to attack one of the evil genii who shadowed the life of her he loved. Fifty yards in advance, though, was Agnes, when he commenced following her steps, till a crowd around that common object of our streets, a fallen horse intercepted his view; and, when he had passed the throng, the figure he sought had disappeared.

“O, this weary, weary deceit!” sobbed Lucy, throwing herself on her knees by her bedside and weeping bitterly. Then, sighing, she rose, folded her mantle, and bathed her eyes before going to the sitting-room, where in a few more minutes her sewing-machine was rapidly



beating until Septimus came and, with one loving hand laid across her red eyes, took away the candle.

## CHAPTER V.

### MATT'S DISCOVERY.

“HOLD hard here!” cried a voice from a cab-window; and the driver of as jangling a conveyance as ever rattled over London stones drew up at the corner of Carey-street, Chancery-lane.

“I’ll get out here,” cried the voice; and very slowly, and with the aid of a stick, old Matt extricated himself from amongst the straw, a part of which he managed to drag out into the road.

The next minute the cabman was paid and had driven off. The boy who, with a basket slung across his back, had stopped to witness the disembarkation, and cut his popular song in half the while, resumed the refrain and went on along the Lane; while, with a smile on his pale face, old

Matt slowly made his way down Carey - street, stopping to rest at the first lamp-post.

“Here I am,” he said; “King Space come back to my dominions. I wasn’t going to ride and lose the pleasure of seeing it all. Thank God there’s no whitewash here, and everything’s just as I left it; things looking as if they hadn’t stirred a peg; and I don’t suppose they have, if they haven’t been costs, which certainly do grow and flourish well here. Lord, sir, how beautiful and smoky and natural everything looks once more! There’s Hardon’s old printing-office—ah, to be sure! ‘Grimp, Deeds copied.’ That’s the trade to flourish here. Now then, sir, good-morning! Let’s get on a bit farther.”

According to his old custom, and heedless now of its being broad daylight, Matt made his way slowly to the next post, making his crippled state an excuse now for stopping, though there was hardly a soul to be seen in Carey - street, and those who passed were too intent upon their own affairs to notice him.

“Slow work, sir,” said Matt, stopping again,

“glad to see you, though, once more. Thought at one time, if ever I did it would have been upon a cork-leg, sir; for I couldn’t have stood a wooden peg, sir, anyhow; a cork-leg all springs and watchwork, like old Tim Christy’s, as used to squeak with every step he took, just as if, being of cork, someone was trying to draw it; and he never oiled that leg, for fear it should go too easy. But there, I’m all right again,” he continued, taking a pinch of snuff, “and I call this real enjoyment, sir—real enjoyment. Only wait till I’ve put him all right upon that point, and I’ll have a bit of dissipation. Let’s see: the Vice-chancellor will be sitting like a great god, listening to the prayers of the petitioners in Chancery. I’ll have an hour there, sir, and then take a sniff of the ink in one of the old offices; and confound it all, sir, I wish you could join me! I’ll have half-a-pint of porter in Fetter-lane. I’m in for a regular round of dissipation, I am, just to make up for all this being shut up.”

On again went the old man, rather short of breath, till he was well in sight of the hospital

at the end of the street ; when, raising his eyes just as he was about to stop, he caught sight of a pale, weary face at one of the windows, and shuddered and turned away ; but the next moment he had stopped and turned, and was waving a hand to the patient gazing from his prison-window.

“ God bless you, mate !” said Matt aloud, “ and may you soon be out of it !” And then there was a reply waved to his salute, and the old man turned down the courts to the left, and soon stood in Bennett’s-rents.

“ What, Matt !” cried Septimus Hardon, hurrying to open the door as he heard his slow step upon the stairs ; while Lucy took the old man’s other hand and helped him to a seat.

“ What’s left of me, sir—what’s left,” said the old man cheerily ; “ and here I am right and clear-headed, and I did see it all, sir : and I’ve recollected it, and got it all put down here, so as you can read it, and safe in my head too. It wasn’t fancy, it was all right ; and I did see it, as I told you, in what must have been the old doctor’s books.”

“ But where? when ?” cried Septimus eagerly.

“ And there was the name — ‘ Mrs. Hardon, medicine and attendance, so much ;’ but of course I thought nothing of it then.”

“ But,” cried Septimus, as he hooked a finger in a button-hole of the old man’s coat, “ where was it ?”

“ Gently, sir, gently,” said Matt, unhooking the finger ; “ mind what you’re after : stuff’s tender. But there : you’ll fit me out with a new suit when you’re all right—won’t you, sir, eh ?”

“ A dozen, Matt, a dozen !” cried Septimus eagerly.

“ And Miss Lucy here’s to have as full a compassed pianner as can be got, without having one as would burst and break all the strings—eh, miss, eh ?”

Lucy smiled sadly.

“ But where did you see it, Matt—where was it ?” exclaimed Septimus, inking his face in his excitement, and totally destroying his last hour’s work.

“ Why, sir, no farther off than at my lodgings,” cried Matt triumphantly. “ I did mean to be of use to you if I could, and I’ve lived to do

it, sir, and I'm thankful ; but come along, sir—come along. I'm weak and poorly yet, and there seems to be a deal of water collected in my system—a sort of dropsy, you know ; and it all flies to my eyes on the least provocation, and comes dripping out like that, just as if I was a great gal, and cried, d'ye see ?”

There was a tear in Septimus Hardon's eye as he warmly wrung the old man's hand, and ten minutes after they were standing in Lower Serles - place, with Matt smiling grimly at a freshly - painted set of skeleton old bone letters upon a glossy - black board, announcing “ Isaac Gross, Dealer in Marine-stores ;” but that was the only alteration visible, for Isaac and the stout lady occupied the same places as of yore, and were at that very moment engaged in an affectionate, smiling game of bo-peep.

“ Might have waited for me to dance at the wedding,” muttered Matt.

But there had been very little dancing at the said wedding ; while the trip necessary upon such occasions was one made to the Rye House, where

Isaac's attention was principally taken up by the jack-boot shown amongst the curiosities—a boot which filled his imagination for days after, as he sighed and thought of the evanescent nature of his own manufacture.

The greeting was warm on both sides, Isaac smiling at a quicker rate than had ever before been known. But the visitors meant business, and Matt exclaimed :

“Now, Ike, we want to go over the waste-paper.”

Matt was outside as he spoke, and then Mrs. Gross, whose head had been stretched out to listen, found that what had been her property was in question, so she cried, “Stop!” and waddled from her seat to where Matt stood, seized him by the arm, and waddled him into Isaac's workshop, from whence she waddled him into the back-parlour, where his bed, now the only one in the room, was neatly made up, and the place somewhat tidier than of yore, though the waste-paper heap was bigger than ever.

“Now,” said Mrs. Gross, with a very fat smile



and a knowing twinkle of her eye as she sank her voice to a whisper, "Is it deeds?" and then she looked at Isaac as if for approbation, that gentleman having followed them into the room and being engaged in vain endeavours to thrust a very large finger into his very small pipe-bowl.

"Who married the kitchen-stuff?" shouted a small voice at the door, and Mrs. Gross angrily waddled out in pursuit, to the great delight of half a score of the small inhabitants of Serle's-place, one of whom danced a defiant *pas seul* in a tray of rusty keys as he fled, laughing the while at the fat threatening hand held up. But Isaac stirred not, from having been accustomed to the gibes of the juveniles of the place, and his skin being too thick for such banderillos as "Waxy," "Welty," or "Strap-oil," to penetrate, so he merely stood wiping his nose upon his leather apron till his partner returned.

"Is it deeds?" whispered Mrs. Gross again, and then in a parenthesis, "Drat them boys!"

"No," said Matt gruffly, "it ain't."

"Then it's bank-bills," said the lady mysteriously, as she slyly winked at everyone in turn, her husband smiling at her acute business perceptions.

"No, nor it ain't them neither," said Matt.

"Then it's a will," said Mrs. Gross in a disappointed tone; "and there ain't a scrap of that sort in the place, for I sold out last week."

"'Tain't a will, I tell you," growled Matt.

"Then it's dockymens," said Mrs. Gross triumphantly, and she nudged Matt in the side.

"No it ain't; nor receipts, nor letters, nor nothing of the kind. If you must know, it's them old doctor's books; that's what it is. Now, where are they?"

But Mrs. Gross, though she had not the slightest idea as to what doctor's books were meant, was not yet satisfied, but cried:

"Halves!"

"What's halves?" said Matt.

"Why, we goes halves in what turns up," said Mrs. Gross, who had a famous eye for business, though she would keep dimming its

brightness by winking at her visitors in a most unfeminine manner.

"Halves be hanged!" cried Matt in a disgusted tone; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mother Slagg."

"Gross!" cried a sepulchral voice, which made Septimus start, till he found that it had proceeded from Mr. Isaac himself, though his face did not betray that he had spoken.

"Gross, then," growled Matt. "Now look here," he continued; "it's nothing but an old entry as I once saw in some doctor's books on your counter here, and we want to see it; for I hadn't sense then to know it was any good; but if we find it, and it's what we want, my guv'nor here will stand a sovereign, I dessay."

"Put it down on paper, then," said Isaac, "and make him sign;" to the great admiration of his partner, who patted him upon the back for his display of business ability; and then, before a paper was touched, Septimus Hardon, greatly to Matt's disgust, signed a promissory and conditional note for the amount named.

"Ikey," growled Matt, "I didn't think you had been such a Jew. If you haven't let my rooms, you can get yourself a fresh tenant."

But Isaac only smiled, and the task commenced—no light one—of turning over the huge stack of waste-paper piled up before them. Dust, dirt, and mildew; brief-paper, copying-paper, newspaper, old books, old magazines and pamphlets, account-books with covers and account-books without; paper in every phase; while eagerly was everything in the shape of an account-book seized upon, and the search continued until, faint and weary, they had gone through the whole heap, when with a despairing, doleful look Septimus gazed upon Matt.

"I'll take my Bible oath it was in a book I saw laid upon that heap. Now then, where's some more?" and the old man said it feebly, as if nearly exhausted.

"No more anywheres," said Mrs. Gross assuringly, as she smoothed her husband's oily hair.

"Sure?" cried Matt.

Mrs. Gross nodded, and retied the ribbon which confined her husband's locks.

"Where is it, then?" cried Matt.

"Where is it?" repeated Mrs. Gross. "Why, if it ain't here, in this heap, it's everywhere. It's sold, and burnt, and wrapped round 'bacca, and butter, and all sorts."

"Hadn't we better go, Matt?" whispered Septimus, dreamily washing his hands together after his dry custom.

"S'pose we had," muttered Matt. "Just, too, sir, as I'd made so sure as it was all coming right, and for the second time, too. Never mind, sir, it'll all come right yet. Third time never fails. What do you say to hunting up the Miss Thingumy at Finsbury, and hearing what she's got to say?—plenty, depend upon it. News, perhaps, and it can't do no harm."

But Septimus Hardon was in a weary, absent fit, and went away muttering homewards, as, worn-out and weak, Matt sat down upon the waste-paper ruins of the palace he had built in his own mind, and grimly listened to the congratulations of his friends upon his return.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH.

FOR a good hour together Mr. Jarker would rest in a broken-bottomed chair, smoking a short black pipe, his hands supporting his heavy chin, and his elbows making pits in his knees, as, like some hideous old cathedral gargoyle, he sat gazing fixedly at the little wondering face of the child. From time to time he reversed his position to refresh himself with a draught of his favourite beverage—gin and beer, a beverage which always produced a loud smack from his thick negro lips. If there was no fascination in the child's face for Bill Jarker, there was most certainly fascination in the ruffian's face for the child; and unconsciously imitating his attitude, it would rest its dimply plump cheeks upon its tiny fists, and gaze

again wonderingly, without a thought of moving, till the lids slowly sank over the violet eyes, and the little golden-haired, soft, lovable head sank sideways, with all those prettiest of pretty motions seen in one of the most beautiful sights in nature—a child dropping off into its simple trusting sleep of innocence; but soon it would start into wakefulness again, with a frightened air, and its little face drawn and ready to cry; but a glance at the hideous face before it subdued the disposition, and once more the same long, weary gaze commenced.

This took place day after day, and a stranger seeing it might have fancied that in this case innocence was exercising its power over guilt; but one who knew Mr. Jarker well would have arrived at the right idea, namely, that this gentleman was making his plans. A pipe or two of tobacco, a pint of beer strengthened with gin, and a long stare at the face of his wife when living, a cat, a dog, or of late the child, had been the preliminaries of more than one desperate burglary in a country place somewhere within a circle of fifty

miles' radius, taking St. Paul's as the centre. Bill's *confrères* in the birdcatching profession contented themselves with trips countryward to the extent of eight or ten miles; but, though on the whole Bill and his two or three companions caught fewer birds, he never let distance interfere with his pursuits, and used to boast that the birds he netted were of a rarer kind. Bill would travel third-class almost any distance to find good pitches for his nets; and even then, perhaps, after a three or four days' trip, and returning with hardly a bird, he seemed to be so infatuated with the place and its prospects, that he would gather together his two or three intimates, and go down again, travelling slowly by road, setting off too in such a hurry, in a miserable cart drawn by a wretched-looking hack, that friends and self would entirely forget nets and call-birds, when they would console themselves with the remark that they might take a few nightingales.

So that Mr. Jarker was not undergoing a softening process as he sat staring at the child, for he was really making his plans; and this time



these plans had nothing to do with either birds or nocturnal visits. There was something particular in Mr. Jarker's head, or else he would not have burdened himself with the child for a single day; while he had carefully retained it in his custody now for many weeks; and the ruffian's ideas must have been of a somewhat strange character, for now and then he would shake his head at the drowsy child, and say :

“ Yes, my little chickin', you do for a bait.”

So of late, apparently for the sake of the child, Mr. Jarker had suffered the bellows; and, in consideration of a small sum weekly, Mrs. Sims had sniffed about the room, and, to use her own expressive words, “ done for him.” But now, probably from too much spiritual exercise, Mrs. Sims was ill, and no one dared go near the ruffian's room but Lucy, whose heart bled for the little thing. Left still for hours together alone in the dreary room, sometimes but half fed, afraid to do more than whimper softly, her sole amusement was to press her little face against the closed window, and watch until she could catch a glimpse of

her neighbour, when the tiny hands would be clapped with glee. The neighbours said it was a shame; but they had their own affairs to attend to, and said no more. While, as might be expected, Lucy seized every opportunity of tending the child most lovingly; watching for Jarker's absence, and then hurrying up and spending perhaps an hour in the miserable attic.

"She must be ill," Lucy would think, "or something is wrong; for surely it was fancy on her part that he should wish to retain the child;" and, though anxious that it should be better tended, she looked forward with dread to the time when it should be taken away; while as anxiously she watched for a visit from Agnes. Night after night the candle burned in her window, as she worked on at some exercise; but Agnes Hardon came not, telling her weary heart that it was for Lucy's good.

Sometimes Jarker would omit to turn the key he always left in his door, as if to provoke inquiry into his affairs, and to show the guilelessness of his life; and then, after waiting until his footstep

became inaudible, the child would steal softly down step by step, fleeing back if she heard a door open or a foot upon the stairs, but only to persevere till, unobserved, she reached the entrance, when, watching till the attention of the children of the court was directed elsewhere, she would dart across the pavement, enter the opposite house, creep up to the first-floor, and then crouch down by the step which led into the front-room, and peer beneath the door, through the opening made by the long hard wear of feet for a century and a half—watching, perhaps for a couple of hours, the bright guiding spirit of the sewing-machine. But at last Lucy would catch sight of the two round bright eyes, peering beneath the door; and to her mother's great annoyance at one time, and supreme satisfaction upon another, she would fetch in the child, when according to Mrs. Hardon's mood she would act; for if the invalid was fretful and weary, the little thing would be taken up to Jean, where she would stay willingly amongst the birds, as the cripple eagerly tried to be of service to his beautiful neighbour. But there were

difficulties here, for Jean could only render this aid when *ma mère* was absent, though this was more frequently now since Bijou had learned to stand upon his head, and so brought in more remuneration, without taking into consideration his later accomplishment of climbing two chairs, rail by rail, forefeet upon one, hindfeet upon another, and then smoking a tobaccoless pipe in triumph upon the summit, as he spanned the distance between the two chairs, and turned himself into a canine arch. But Bijou doubtless did not enjoy his pipe for remembering how that he was *bête*, and for thinking of the whip, and the rapping his poor legs received before he was able to obey his mistress's commands—that is if dogs can think.

There seemed to be a tacit understanding between *ma mère* and Lucy; an acknowledged dislike upon the old woman's part, which made the latter carefully avoid her, shrinking back into the room if she heard her footstep, so as not to encounter the quiet bitter smile and sneering gaze of the old woman, while *ma mère* reviled Jean angrily, calling him nurse-girl, *bonne*, when by

chance she learned of his past occupation. But Jean cared not, so long as there was something that should bring Lucy to his attic, where he could feast greedily upon her bright face and graceful form; and, could he have gone about, he would have followed her like a dog.

Jean's lark sang more loudly than ever, and Lucy's eyes had brightened as she told the cripple again and again how she loved its sweet notes; and, watching her press her lips once to the cage-wires, inviting the speckled bird to take a seed from the rosy prison, Jean's eyes dimmed as he gazed at her with a reverence approaching adoration. Visitor after visitor came to that attic, and went, buying and selling, and the little prisoners were constantly being changed; but the lark was there still, though more than once of late Jean had pressed its acceptance upon Lucy Grey; but with a sweet smile she had thanked him, begging that he would keep it for her sake; and he kept it, in spite of many an angry word from *ma mère* when some advantageous offer had been made by a visitor;

and it still whistled from its perch in the window.

“I will sell the bird myself; it is waste, it is pity, when we are so poor,” *ma mère* would exclaim; and then Jean would turn upon her a peculiar soft, sweet smile, and whisper, “No, *ma mère*, you will not sell my bird, because I love it;” when passionately the old woman would now scold, now fondle the cripple, as she hung over the back of his chair.

One evening when the moon hung high in air, waiting the fading of day before shedding her pale light, Jean sat in his usual place in the window, dreaming of scenes of which he had read, and thinking himself in some sweet woodland home, forgetting the presence of squalor and misery, and even of the cages, as he listened to the twittering of the many birds hung around his head. There was a brightness in his eye and a smile upon his lip, for he was gazing across the court at just such a scene as once almost spellbound the curate. Merrily romping with the child, he could see Lucy in Jarker’s

room, fitting backwards and forwards past the open window. The child's happy laugh could be heard mingled with its shouts of pleasure, for the pent-up joyousness of its little nature was now having free vent.

All at once Jean's look of quiet enjoyment changed to one of unutterable rage and despair; the lips, but now apart in a soft smile, were drawn, as if by some fearful pain, his teeth were clenched, and his eyes wild and dilated. He tried to rise, but his helplessness was such that he sank back in his chair panting; but, raising his crutch, he struck savagely on the casement, shivering two or three of the little panes. He tried again and again to get up, and inarticulate sounds came from his lips. It was pitiful to gaze upon the struggle between the strong mind and the weak body, which would not obey his will as he tried again to rise; till, with a savage, guttural cry, more like that of some disappointed beast of prey than a human being, he threw himself towards the open window, as in his efforts his chair was overturned and he

fell upon the floor, where he lay agonisingly writhing in his impotence, as he absolutely foamed at the mouth.

Just then the door behind him opened, and, with a book beneath his arm, Mr. Sterne entered the room; when seeing, as he thought, the cripple in a fit, he sprang forward and raised him in his arms to place him in a chair, at the same time running over in his own mind what would be the best course of action. But as he gazed in the poor fellow's dilated eyes, and saw their look of unutterable despair, one of Jean's hands was fiercely clutching his shoulder, and the other was pointing and waving frantically towards the open window.

The next instant, as if some strange suspicion had flashed upon his mind, the curate was gazing across the court, to utter almost the counterpart of the cry that had issued from the throat of Jean, as he caught sight of Lucy, frightened and horror-stricken, backing towards the room-door, and Jarker, evidently half-mad with drink, holding her tightly by one arm; for he had returned



unexpectedly, and taking advantage of the girl's preoccupation, had stolen softly into the room and closed the door.

Arthur Sterne saw this at one glance, and his face turned pale as ashes with the thoughts that this hasty look engendered. The next moment he had half-climbed from the window and stood holding by one hand, measuring the distance across the court, as he stooped, lithe and elastic, ready for the bound; but reason told him that it was utter madness to attempt so wild a leap—a leap certainly death for himself, and probably worse than death for her he sought to save; and dashing back into the room he tore down the staircase.

Recovering somewhat, Jean now let himself slide down upon the floor, and, panting heavily, began to walk painfully across the room; for a moment he looked at the window, but the next he was making for the door, and then lowering himself from stair to stair. But before he was down the first flight, there was rescue at hand for Lucy. Bounding up the frail old staircase of

the opposite house, Arthur Sterne dashed frantically on, so that at every leap the woodwork cracked and trembled as if ready to give way. The height never seemed so great before, as landing after landing was passed, till he reached the last, to launch himself against the frail door, which, driven from its hinges, fell with a crash ; and the next moment, dropping like some inert mass from the blow which fell upon his face, Jarker made the old place quiver beneath his weight. And there he lay, stupid and helpless from the sudden shock ; the effect of the blow being apparently enough to destroy life, for the ruffian did not move.

Hardly breathing, and uttering no sound, the child crouched fearfully in a corner ; while Lucy, trembling and half-fainting, clung to the curate, as sob after sob burst from her breast ; and at last, as if stricken by death, she sank back pale and inanimate upon his supporting arm.

But there were no looks of love in Arthur Sterne's face ; for, with brow knit, nostrils distended, and every vein in his face swollen and

knotted, he stood with his heel crushed down upon Jarker's bull-throat, no mean incarnation of vengeance. Soon, though, the breath he had drawn with difficulty as he stood there holding the fainting girl to his throbbing heart, came more lightly, the expression of rage fled from his features, and as he gazed tenderly upon the pale face so near his own he pressed his lips reverently upon her forehead.

"Lucy, my poor dove," he whispered, "will you not give me the right to protect you, and take you from this place?"—"Our beauty, some of us," seemed sighed at his ear.

"A lie, a base lie!" he muttered fiercely; though even then a change came over his face, the veins swelled once more in his forehead, and an agony of strange thoughts passed through his breast. And now, pale and anxious, two or three of the women lodgers came trembling to the door, amongst whom was Mrs. Sims, ready to take possession of the child, as, hurriedly passing through the wondering group, the curate bore his light burden to her home.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A MEETING AND ITS RESULT.

It was late before Arthur Sterne left Bennett's-rents that night. Septimus Hardon had been terribly excited—talking long and wildly of his poverty being the cause of the insult offered to his child. He had walked hurriedly up and down the room, gesticulating and threatening the scoundrel who had so repaid Lucy's kindness; and again and again it was upon the curate's lips to speak of the little one, and of Lucy's strange intimacy with its mother; but his spirit revolted from the task. In another case he would have spoken instantly; but here duty seemed to move in fetters that he could not break. In all concerning the poor girl he seemed bound to preserve silence till such time as some explana-

tion should be given, and through all he had been in constant dread lest he should give her pain.

“I must prosecute the villain!” exclaimed Septimus.

“But the pain—the exposure—your child?” said the curate.

“What! would you have him go unpunished?” exclaimed Septimus.

“I would say ‘No!’ directly,” replied the curate; “but I cannot help thinking of the painful scene in court, the public examination, and the cross-examination by the prisoner’s counsel; and these men can always among themselves manage to get some able person to undertake their cause. It would be a most painful position in which to place your child. Her actions would be distorted to suit a purpose; and such a scene—”

Mr. Sterne’s speech dwindled off, and became inaudible; for he felt that he had spoken unadvisedly, and a strange chill came over him as he thought, in the event of the affair being in

court, what hold the opposing counsel could take of certain acts in Lucy's life; for, let them be ever so innocent, the light in which they would place her would be of the most painful character; and his lips were rather white as he said, "Sleep on it, Mr. Hardon, sleep on it."

"I will," said Septimus proudly. "We are poor, Mr. Sterne; but there is no act in my dear child's life that will not bear the light of day."

"Doubtless, doubtless," replied the curate in a low tone; "but, believe me, my advice is given with the best of wishes and intentions, Mr. Hardon. Have I not always tried to be a friend? And if there was somewhat of selfishness in my advances, I feel no shame in owning to you that I am moved by a feeling of more than esteem for Miss Grey; to whom any proceedings would, I am sure, be as painful as to myself."

Septimus Hardon started, for this was as sudden as unexpected. Such a thought had never entered his breast, and he gazed wonderingly at the calm, pale face before him; as in the silence which ensued they both sat listening to

the painful, low sob which came now and again from the next room, where, forgetful of her own infirmities, Mrs. Hardon had been trying to soothe the agitated girl.

And then, hour after hour, Septimus sat talking with Mr. Sterne—for the first time now giving himself up entirely to his advice, and promising to give up all thought of prosecution, while he sought at once for some more suitable home for his wife and child, though, as he thought of his narrow, precarious income, he made the latter promise with a sigh. He talked long and earnestly, too, about his own affairs, being ready now to take the counsel that Mr. Sterne so freely offered; and when, with a lighter heart, the curate rose to leave, Septimus shook hands, with a puzzled expression upon his face, as if he hardly believed in the events of the past evening.

Upon slowly descending and reaching the door, Mr. Sterne drew back, asking himself whether he should be content, or seize the opportunity that now offered for him to know that of which it was evident, from his language, Septimus Hardon was

still ignorant. The desire was strong to know more, and he yielded to it; for there before him, standing in the open court, and gazing anxiously up at the lighted window, was the woman who had caused him so much uneasiness; but neither he nor the woman saw that in the shade of the opposite doorway a villanous pair of eyes were on the watch.

Again and again he had encountered this woman since he had determined to question her—upon the bridge at early dawn; by night, in the crowded streets, dressed in the extreme of fashion; shabbily dressed by day; but she always fled, and contrived to elude him. Who was she? What was she? How came she intimate with Lucy? Was it merely for the child's sake? Then why Lucy's dread?

The opportunity was here, he told himself, and he would know; and then, as he formed the determination, he stepped quickly out; but no sooner did Agnes Hardon catch sight of the curate's pale, stern face by the sickly flicker of the one lamp than she turned and fled, while,



without pausing to think, the curate closed the door and pursued her.

A dark, gusty time, late, for two had struck but a minute before by church after church—some sending their booming announcement clearly out upon the night-air, others discordantly, and jangling with the bells of others. Turning towards the end of the court, Agnes ran swiftly, her dress rustling, and fashionable boots pattering upon the pavement; but her pursuer was quick of foot, and followed her along the end row, through Harker's-alley, Ray's-court, along one labyrinth and down another of the old district, now falling beneath the contractor's pick, till they had nearly returned to the point from whence they started. But flight was of no avail, and soon Arthur Sterne overtook the panting woman, himself breathless, and, heedless of her fierce looks, caught her by the wrist.

“Come with me,” he said sternly, as he drew her towards the entrance of the dark court where they stood.

“Why, why?” she exclaimed passionately,

struggling with him the while. "Why do you stop me? Why do you pursue me—you, too, a clergyman?"

The answer to the taunt was a cold look, which Agnes Hardon saw and felt; for the next moment she was weeping passionately. "Why do you track and follow me, sir?" she exclaimed through her tears. "Let me go; you hurt my arm!"

"Will you stand and answer my questions, then?" said the curate, as they now stood at the entrance of the court—a dark, gloomy archway, with a doorway here and there.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Agnes wearily, "if you will be quick; but there, I know what you would say, and it is of no use; I am past all that!"

"Past all what?" cried the curate sternly.

"Hope of better things," said the woman with so weary and despondent a wail, that her hearer shuddered.

"Hush!" he said; "you speak rashly, and without thinking;" and releasing her wrist, he laid his hand gently upon her arm. "Listen,"

he said; "you have your woman's feelings yet!"

"No," she replied hastily, "all—all gone; driven out of me—dead. Let me go, please; it's late, sir. I am a wretch, and it is useless to talk."

"But why do you pursue that young girl?" he said, pointing across the street to where Bennett's-rents debouched. "Would you tempt her to be your companion?"

"No, no, no; my God, no!" half-shrieked Agnes, as she caught at his hands; "don't think that, sir."

"Then you *have* some womanly feeling left," said Mr. Sterne.

"Towards her, perhaps, yes."

"And your child?"

"Yes, yes, yes," wailed Agnes; "but don't torture me. What do you know?—what do you wish me to do?—why do you follow me?"

"What is your name?" said the curate sternly; "and how came you to know her?" and he pointed again towards Bennett's-rents."

“Don’t ask me, I cannot tell you,” sobbed Agnes.

“But you bring misery on her and on her home. You have some hold upon her?”

“No, no, no,” sobbed Agnes hysterically; “none, none; but she knows who I am, and pities me and my poor child. God’s blessing on her!”

“Amen!” muttered the curate under his breath, and his companion sobbed so convulsively that she could not speak, while, as they stood in the dark entry, a policeman came slowly by, flashed the light of his bull’s-eye upon them for an instant, recognised the curate and passed on, and, till he was out of hearing, Agnes Hardon clutched the curate’s arm.

“You are not afraid of the world and its opinions,” she said bitterly; “it cannot hurt you. Stay with me and I will tell you all, for I believe you mean me well.”

The curate bowed his head.

“I am miserable, wretched,” she sobbed, “and what can I do? That man in the court has my poor child, and for some reason he will not give it

up. I have tried to get it away again and again, even to stealing it, sir—my own little one ; but something has always prevented me, and he watches me till, hardened as I am, I am afraid of him, for he comes over my spirit like the shadow of some great horror about to crush me. I love my child, my pure little angel, for—O sir, have pity on me, have pity!—I am its mother, and what else have I here to cling to ? Can you not think how I must love it though I left it with that poor dead woman ? But she had a mother's heart, and was kind to it always. I could see it in my darling's blue eyes even when it racked my heart ; but I was glad, though it would not come to me, and called her mother. I was happy then, for did not she—she you say I injure—watch over it for me, and tell me of its bright eyes and sunny hair and winning ways, while, when I have listened to her, the tears have come gently to quench the fire in my brain, and I could think of home and the past, while she—she who loves my little one—lets me weep upon her breast, and I forget for a while that I am lost, lost, lost for ever !”

“Lost, lost, lost for ever !” She uttered these words so hopelessly, with such a wail of agony, that they seemed to echo along the archway, and to float off upon the night breeze, rising and falling, an utterance never to fade away, but to go on for ever and ever while this world lasts ; to smite upon the sleeping ears of the cruel, the dissolute, and the profligate ; to awaken here, perhaps, one sorrowful thought for wrong done, one thought of repentance ; there, a desire to pause, ere it be too late, on the brink of some iniquity that should break a trusting woman’s heart.

Tenderly, and with such a strange feeling of compassion in his heart as might have pervaded that of his Master whose words he taught, Arthur Sterne took the weeping woman’s hands in his, as, sobbing more bitterly than ever, she sank upon her knees on the cold stones at his feet, weeping as though her heart would break ; nay, as if through the torn walls of that broken citadel the flood of tears went seething and hissing, the ruins yet smouldering and burning with the fire of the fatal passion that had been their fall.

“What shall I do, sir?” she cried at length, wearily looking up in the face that bent over her. “I would take my little one away and go near the place no more, for I have been seldom lately, not liking that he should see me with her, for he followed us once, and I did not like it. I would have told her not to go near my child, but there is a woman sometimes there. He will not let me take it away. But tell me what to do, sir,” she said wearily, “and I will do it.”

“What!” she cried, starting up, “what!” she half shrieked, as he related to her the incident of the past night; “and this through me? Am I to bring misery everywhere? O God, O God!” she cried, “that my weakness, my sin, should be ever growing and bringing its misery upon others! But stop, sir; listen,” she exclaimed huskily, as she clung to his arm; “what shall we do? If I could have seen this, sir, I’d have died sooner than it should have happened; believe me, I would.”

The curate bent his head once more, as they stood facing the street, and said, in low, impressive

tones, "I do believe you ;" but he took no heed to a light, stealthy pace in the alley behind.

"What shall I do, sir ?" cried Agnes eagerly.

"Take the child away at once," replied Mr. Sterne, "and leave this life. But will you?"

"If the gates of heaven were opened, sir, and One said, 'Come in, poor sinner, and rest,' should I go?"

The stealthy step came nearer, but was unnoticed.

"Now tell me your name, and how came the intimacy of which I complain," said Mr. Sterne.

"I—I knew the family ; I knew Lucy—Miss Grey—before her father—and—pray, pray ask me no more," gasped Agnes appealingly. "I will do all you wish, sir. Help me to get my child, and I will go anywhere you may tell me ; but don't ask me that, sir."

"Nay," said Mr. Sterne, with beating heart, for he felt that her reply would drive away his last doubt, "tell me now ; you may trust me."

"Yes, yes," sobbed Agnes ; "I know, but I cannot."

The step sounded very close now, while the light



from the lamp in the alley was for a moment obscured.

“I will do all that you ask,” sobbed Agnes. “Tell me what else you wish, and I will be as obedient as a child, but—”

“Prove it, then, by telling me how began your intimacy with Miss—”

There was a wild scream from Agnes Hardon as she thrust the curate aside ; but too late, for a heavy, dull blow from behind crushed through his hat, and stretched him upon the pavement, where, for an instant, a thousand lights seemed dancing before his eyes, and then all was blank.

It was no unusual sound that, a woman’s shriek, especially the half-drunken cry of some street wanderer ; but one window was opened, and a head thrust out, whose owner muttered for a moment and then closed the sash, for though he had seen a woman struggling with a man, he did not hear the words that passed, nor could he see that the man was trying hard to extricate himself from the woman’s grasp ; but there were other wakeful eyes upon the watch.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WASTE-PAPER.

“WELL, yes, sir,” said Matt, standing hat in hand, “’tis snug and comfortable, sir ; and I’m glad to see the change, and I’m sure I wish you long life to enjoy it. Glad you’ve got here all right, sir ; and sorry I was too weak to help you move. I’ve got the address down all right in my mem.-book : look here, sir—150 Essex-street, Strand, sir.”

“And now we’ll go, then, Matt,” said Septimus, rising.

“Go, sir ?” said Matt.

“Yes,” said Septimus, “if you will ; for the thing has been too long neglected already.”

“Very true, sir,” said Matt ; “but you told

me as the parson, sir, Mr. Sterne, was going to take it in hand ; and if so—”

“ Now, Matt,” said Septimus appealingly, “ isn’t he lying upon a bed of sickness, weak and helpless, and unable to move ?”

“ Well, yes, sir, that’s true ; and a rum start that was, too. Wonder who would have a spite against him ? But I thought that now, sir, as you’d—”

Septimus Hardon took the old man by the arm and placed him in a chair ; for it was evident that he was a little testy and jealous of other interposition in the matters in which he had taken so much interest ; but the cordiality of Mrs. Septimus seemed to chase it away ; while Lucy, returning from a walk, beamed so happily upon the old man, that he looked his old self again, and owned to the feeling that, as he expressed it, he had expected that he was going to be “ pitched overboard,” now there were new friends.

It was partly by Mr. Sterne’s advice that Septimus had sought out and asked Matt to accompany him this day ; for though much hurt, and

weak from loss of blood, the curate had taken great interest in the future of the Hardon family. At his request Septimus had sought and removed to lodgings in Essex-street, and since then passed an evening by the curate's bedside ; for he had been found by a policeman perfectly insensible, and carried home ; and, though nearly certain of who was his assailant, he felt indisposed to take any steps in the matter for fear that affairs might be made public which he wished concealed. He had not seen Lucy since ; but somehow there was a feeling of repose and content within his breast that it had not known for months ; and he longed for the time when he could again meet with the woman whose words would have, he now felt, set him at rest for ever.

There seemed, too, a brightness in Lucy foreign to her looks, as Septimus leaned over her and whispered a few words before leaving ; then, after kissing her tenderly, he descended to the street with old Matt, who, though weak, still refused sturdily every offer of a ride, and they trudged steadily on till they reached Finsbury.

“Hallo!” said Matt, “what d’ye call this? Same name, but the business is changed, and that’s her a-cutting up paper. To be sure—why it is her! I thought I knew her face, but I was in such a muddle just then that all my letter was mixed, and whenever I wanted a p, I got a q, and all on like that. Why, she came and chattered away, and bought an old set of tobacco-jars and covers and a heap of waste-paper of Mother Slagg, just before I went into hospital; and there they are, sir—that’s them, fresh varnished and painted, and stuck on the shelf. Ikey took ’em home for her, and I remember asking myself ever so long as to where I’d seen her before. Well, come on, sir. I want a bit of snuff, so that’s an excuse for going in. P’r’aps, after all, she’s bought the very paper.”

The visitors made their way into the old formal registry-office, turned into a very smart little shop, fitted up with some taste; where Miss Tollicks herself was busily weighing and packing a pile of those little rolls of tobacco known as “screws.” Fine thick paper, too, she was using,

such as would weigh well and add to the rather fine profit she obtained upon her fragrant weed. For there was no mistake : Miss Tollicks had executed her threat, turned the registering out of doors, and taken to the business most popular in the streets of London. No seat now existed for maids to sit and wait to be hired from ten to four ; no green baize ; no intense air of respectability, but all quite the correct thing as established by custom in the weedy way. There was a monster cigar outside, set perpendicularly, with an internal gas-jet, and a transparency bearing the legend, " Take a light." On the other side of the door was a little, freshly-varnished, red-nosed, chip-elbowed Scotchman, taking snuff in the imperfect tense, with his fingers half-way to his nose ; an imitation roll of tobacco hung over the door ; while just inside, upon a tub, stood a small black gentleman in a very light feather petticoat, smoking a pipe about double the length of his body. Then there were clay pipes, crossed and tied into diamond-pattern d'oyleys, swung in the top panes of the windows ; while beneath them

“so gracefully curled” a perfect anaconda of a hookah—one that it would have taken a bold Turk to smoke. There were meerschaums and brier-roots, cutty- and billiard-pipes; glass, cherry, and jasmine stems; tobacco-pouches of india-rubber, looking like fresh-flayed negro-skin; snuff-boxes of all sorts and sizes, embracing miniature, scene, and tartan of every pattern; stacks of cigar-boxes carefully branded but very European in their look; bundles of cigars tied with fancy ribbon; the day’s playbills on the walls; rows of snuff- and tobacco-jars, as pointed out by Matt, and labelled from “Scotch” to “Hardham’s 37,” and from “Returns” to “Latakia.” There was a whole tubful of odorous shag, and a stack of packets of Bristol bird’s-eye; the scales were of the glossiest, the glass-case of the cleanest, and altogether the shop owned by Miss Tollicks seemed to be of the most prosperous; for things looked smart and well attended to—a rare sign of plenty of business, as, according to the old saying, “the less there is to do, the worse it is done;” but there was a strong smell of varnish, and it was

evident that Miss Tollicks had been picking up her fittings here and there at various second-hand stores, or, as Matt Space called it, “on the cheap.”

Matt advanced to the counter and asked for his penn’orth of snuff.

“Then you’re not dead!” exclaimed Miss Tollicks, putting down the jar in a most business-like way, with motions rapid as her speech; for she had banished the black-velvet blackbird and deportment along with the green baize; but, not quite used to her business, in spite of her ability of adapting herself to circumstances, she sneezed loudly as she lifted the lid. “And how do you do?—there, dear me, how I do sneeze!—and I thought I had quite conquered it, for it does look so—tchisher-er—so—er-tchisher! There, I’m sure I beg your pardon. And how do you do? and you’ve got well again, like poor Mary did, in that horrible place, who was dying too, and didn’t. And Mr. Harding too! and I’m so glad to see you, for you were *that* kind to me, I don’t know what I should have done else. Now you’ve



come to ask me about the doctor again—now haven't you?"

Septimus said he had.

"Well, now, I hadn't forgotten it, and you were both right, you know; but I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Harding, for but for you that day, everyone must have seen that I had been crying. But you were right; and the doctor did live here, and died here too, ages ago; and then his widow went to live somewhere in one of those quiet streets by the Strand, going down to the river, you know; and then she died, and there was a sale, and that's all; and it isn't much, is it?"

Septimus said it was not, certainly.

"But then, you know," said Miss Tollicks, "it's no use to try and make more of things of that sort, is it? No, he didn't know the street, nor anything more about it, for he bought the lease of the house of someone else."

As for Matt, he did not speak, but took snuff ferociously, and glared at the paper squares upon the counter.

“But there, do come in,” cried Miss Tollicks; “and, dear me, Mr.—Mr.—I don’t know your name, but don’t, pray, take snuff like that; you’ll make yourself ill. But there, do come in;” and in spite of refusals Miss Tollicks soon had her visitors seated in her bower, in company with a spirit-bottle and a couple of tumblers and sugar, a tiny kettle upon the fire singing merrily.

“I do suffer so from spasms,” said Miss Tollicks as she placed the suspicious-looking spirit-bottle upon the table; but all these preparations were not made at once, for, from her many pops in and out of the shop, and the rattling of the scales, it was evident that Miss Tollicks had chosen the right business at last, and was prospering famously. The decanter was brought out of a Berlin-wool-worked overgrown dice-box on one side of the fire, the glasses from its ditto on the other, the kettle out of a window-locker, and divers other ways of economising space were shown; while the visitors were informed that so much of the house was let off. “It all helps so,” said Miss Tollicks; “for

London rents are enough to kill you ; and you doing nothing but feed your landlord."

Old Matt grunted acquiescence.

"Now one each, please," said Miss Tollicks, "just to be sociable ; and then you can speak up for the quality of my goods. How do you find the snuff, Mr.—?"

"Space, ma'am," said Matt. "Good ; very good, ma'am, but not durable."

"That's right," exclaimed Miss Tollicks, as she pressed the two mild Havannas she had brought in upon her visitors. "Don't mind me, pray—I am trying to get used to smoke as well as snuff."

Septimus and Matt were both non-smokers, but as they exchanged glances they came to the conclusion that they could extinguish their cigars as soon as they were outside. So Septimus set the example, with a very ludicrous cast of countenance, by placing the little vegetable roll in his mouth, and Miss Tollicks tore off a piece of paper from a square on the counter, doubled, lit, and handed it to the smoker.

Septimus Hardon's face was a regular study as Matt, grumbling to himself, "Why didn't she make it snuff?" watched him trying to light his cigar—a new feat to him entirely.

"The other end first, sir," growled Matt; and in a rather confused way Septimus made the requisite alteration, and then sucked and puffed so vigorously that he extinguished the light, which he re-lit at the fire. But the next moment his face changed from one of comical resignation to a state of intense wonder, as old Matt, under the excuse of helping himself to a light, was turning over some leaves of a heap of waste-paper on a chair by the door.

Suddenly Septimus dashed the lighted paper upon the table, hurriedly extinguishing it with trembling hands, but not without oversetting his glass of spirits-and-water.

"What is the matter? Have you burnt yourself?" cried Miss Tollicks.

"Is it, sir?" cried old Matt, reaching across the table.

But Septimus Hardon did not move for a few

seconds, but stood with his hands pressed down over the roughly-folded piece of paper, into which the spirits-and-water was now soaking, as it made a way between his fingers.

“Why didn’t I give you a splint !” exclaimed Miss Tollicks, whose mind was full of goose-grease, starch-powder, and cotton-wool. “Is it very bad ?”

But Septimus Hardon did not speak, only slowly and with palsied hands unfolded the soaked paper ; but even then he could hardly read it for the mist that swam before his eyes. Old Matt, though, not to be behindhand, pulled out his glasses, and stretched out his hand to reach the paper ; but Septimus shrank back, and then read with difficulty, for the ink had begun to look blurred with the wet :

S. HARDON,

Medicine and at-  
dance } 2

And that was all. Septimus turned it over carefully and found a list of names, but no other

entry; there was a figure, part of a date evidently, at one edge, but it was charred, and as he touched it and held it towards the window it crumbled away into brown tinder. He read the entry again and again, and then looked at the ashes of the paper to see if anything could be made of them. Then, as if for a forlorn hope, he turned to his hostess, saying in a strange, husky voice:

“The date’s burnt off. Where did you get this?”

“O, what have I done?” exclaimed Miss Tollicks. “What is the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing,” said Septimus, looking in a dreary, bewildered way at Matt. “It’s of no use; it’s my usual ill-luck, and it’s of no use to fight against it.”

“I never saw such a thing in my life!” cried Matt, bringing his fist down upon the table so that the glasses jumped again. “Put it in a book, and no one would believe it: and yet there it is. I wouldn’t have believed it myself if I had not seen it with my own eyes.”

“But where is the piece you tore it from?” exclaimed Septimus, trembling still.

“To be sure!” cried Matt exultingly. “But I was right—I did see it, and she bought it, and Ikey brought it here, and it’ll all come right yet. —Where’s the piece you tore it from, ma’am?” and he again greatly endangered Miss Tollicks’ glasses by thumping the table.

Miss Tollicks hastily produced the other half of the square of paper; but on one side the list of names was continued, while upon the other there was the tail of a flourish, the tops of a few letters, and the rest was blank.

“Have you any more of these sheets—these book-leaves?” exclaimed Septimus; when Miss Tollicks hastily took up the little heap on the chair by the door, the same that had excited Matt’s curiosity, and into which he had been quietly peering.

“Those are not the same,” said Septimus despondently; “this is thicker.”

“Yes,” said Miss Tollicks dolefully, as she examined the few remaining squares upon the

counter ; “these are all different, too, and I don’t know how that scrap came to be left. I used all that thick paper first, because it weighed well, and I used it for screws.”

“But,” stammered Septimus, “it is a part of the very man’s books—the very man who lived here, and about whom we came to ask you.”

“Bless me !” said Miss Tollicks dolefully, “and I’ve been letting it go for weeks past in screws to the Sun, and the Green Dragon, and the Duke.”

“But let’s see if there’s any more,” said Matt. “A leaf would almost do all we want if it has only got the right dates.”

Matt’s advice was taken : screws were examined, turned over, unrolled ; the tied-up squares of paper were looked at ; Matt went down upon his knees behind the counter and routed about amongst some rubbish ; the squares freshly cut up were looked over ; and then once more the heap on the chair in the room was scanned, leaf by leaf, but only one more fragment was found, evi-



dently a portion of the same book; but it bore a date four years prior to the marriage of Septimus Hardon's parents.

"Makes worse of it," muttered old Matt to himself; "but perhaps he was only a young doctor, and one book lasted him a long time. S'pose we go and have a look round at some of the public-houses," he said aloud, "eh, sir?"

Septimus jumped at the suggestion, and together they noted down the names of Miss Tollicks' principal customers for screws, for she said that she was sure the thick paper had been used entirely for that purpose; but on making inquiry at the different pewter-covered bars, one and all of the stout gentlemen in shirt-sleeves and short white aprons declared that they were sold out, and could have got rid of "twiced as much."

"I suppose," said Septimus to one red-faced gentleman, "it would be of no use to ask you who bought the screws?"

The man stood, and softly rubbed with a strange rasping noise his well-shorn range of

stubble on chin and cheek ; then pulled open the screw-drawer, looked in it, then at the counter, then at Septimus, as if doubtful of his sanity, and said,

“ Well, no, sir, I don’t think as it would.”

They returned to the little tobacconist’s shop, Septimus holding tightly to the newly-found scrap of paper. And yet it was useless—waste-paper ; no more. There could be no doubt about it’s being the entry made when he saw the light ; but now it was found, with his own hand he had destroyed the most precious part, for without date it was of no avail.

Septimus Hardon felt sick at heart when he again sat down in Miss Tollicks’ room, and gazed with woebegone looks in his companion’s face. The prize as it were within his reach ; his old troubles swept away ; his legitimacy proved—the cup almost at his lips, and then dashed away. It was in vain that Miss Tollicks vented her well-meant platitudes, and shone with hospitable warmth ; Septimus Hardon seemed crushed, and Matt had scarcely a word to say.

“Have a little more sugar,” said Miss Tollicks to the man of the bitter cup. “What a tiresome world this is! And only to think of me buying that very paper, and the great dirty ruffian of a man bringing it home, and wanting to buy half-a-pound of tobacco before I began business and had a license; and then asking me if I had any old boots, while he chipped two of the jars shamefully.”

“Only think,” muttered old Matt as they went slowly homewards, “for me to have had that entry under my very nose, and then only turned it up and wouldn’t look at it.”

## CHAPTER IX.

### BY NIGHT.

OLD Matt Space had a certain amount of pride in his composition, and, like most people, he suffered for it. He would gladly have received assistance of the most trifling nature from Septimus Hardon the day they returned from Finsbury; but his companion seemed so dejected and doleful that he had not the heart to bring forward his own troubles, and so it followed that the same night he was complaining to himself about hard times—those ever-recurring, inhospitable seasons when mental storms beat upon the rocks of a man's faith, and many a shipwreck follows. Hard times—times that the science, charity, and statistics of our days soften so little. Warm sunshine, genial rain, bright skies, have but little

influence, and the times keep hard for some, though others, by means of softening mediums, contrive to remain uninjured.

In his dry way old Matt would sometimes say that if he did not cut up well when he died, he should certainly cut up streaky—like thin bacon; for times so fluctuated with him that before a small layer of fat was well established, the lean would again commence; while, if it is fair so to speak of a man whose life had been one long struggle for bare existence, Matt had been somewhat improvident. What he called runs upon the bank were common events with the old printer—times when there were no deposits made, and trade was slack; it was a pleasant trade, printing, he said—nothing to do to-day, and to-morrow busy, up all night afterwards, and then perhaps another long rest.

Old Matt stood in front of the Royal Exchange that night at eleven o'clock, weak from his long illness, tired and faint too, as he lingered there thinking of how he would like to make an onslaught upon the Bank of England, and fill his

pockets, now reduced to the lowest ebb, for he had not sixpence wherewith to pay for a night's lodging. He had not been to the mansion of Mr. Gross to sleep but once since his return from the hospital; for he was largely indebted to that gentleman, and though scarcely anything had been said, Mrs. Gross had dropped just a mild hint, what she considered an exceedingly mild hint, to the effect that, when it was convenient, they would be glad to receive one or two instalments on account.

This made Matt more shy, and after a day or two he stopped away altogether, so that when Septimus Hardon sought at his lodgings, he found him not, and had to inspect the interior of two or three hostelries favoured by the fraternity before he found him out.

"Ah, sir," said Matt, as he hugged a lamp-post, "the times that I've seen them lugging the little chests and barrels in there—heavy so that they could scarcely lift them, and any one of 'em would have set me up for life. Specie, they call it, sir; species as I was always unable

to collect much of in my rambles through life; and it wouldn't take a deal to make me comfortable, anyhow. Precious cold here, sir, for an old man like me, and I don't know that I'd say no, just now, to one of those little iron bedsteads with its clean sheets in the hospital—leastways, if one could feel sure nobody had just died upon it, for the thought of that gives one a turn like, and seems to fidget. Precious cold, sir! Talk about the internal heat of the earth, I wish there was a little more external. Crust of the earth, sir? Yes, sir, there's plenty of crust, and precious little crumb. Red-hot fluid state inside, eh? Then I shall move, sir—move. I was a good will to when I was in the hospital; but I think I shall make up my mind soon, for the world ain't safe—a volcanic, earthquaky place. I shall flit, as they say down north."

"Cold, cold, cold, sir!" shivered the poor old fellow after a pause, as he looked down the long deserted City streets, that teemed so with busy life in the daytime. "That scamp of a valet never reminded me of my greatcoat—a scoundrel.

Thinks a deal more of his own confounded self, sir, than he does of his master. Now look here, sir— There; I know, of course—it's all right; I'm a-going on, I am. 'Move on,' says you; but make the most of it, old chap; for you won't have me to move on much longer."

The old man spoke sadly as an approaching policeman cut short his address; but he went on before he could be told, and made his way slowly down into Cannon-street, where he stopped before another post.

"Now look here, sir," said Matt, as though he had not been interrupted for an instant, "we want an establishment here in town—a club for gentlemen in my position to-night—where we could go and have a basin of hot tea or coffee, or gruel if you like, and a decent, dry, clean, warm bed under shelter, without going to the workhouse. Now, sir, when my ship comes in, I mean to establish just such a place, and make it self-supporting. None of your casual wards in workhouses, but a decent place where honest people can go and do their bit of work over night or



in the morning, to earn their bed and board. Let the idle vagabonds and tramps, sir, go to the casual ward; for there's hundreds of decent people in town every night would be glad to do a bit of work and get their meal and bed. Seems hard, sir," said Matt pitifully, as the cold night wind swept down the street, and he shivered miserably, "seems hard, sir, that in this great place where the wealth is almost running over the side, things are so, that an old chap like me should stand here to-night, as I've stood scores of times before, wanting the work and means for a meal and bed, and not able to get 'em. Now, let's see, sir; what shall we call my place? Hotel? No, that's too fine and grand. Home? Well, no; that sounds like humbugging the poor creatures. 'There's no place like home!' I wish I was at home, I do," shivered the old man. "There, now, there it is again! Another policeman. Public streets, indeed! Ain't I one of the public, and haven't I a right to be in them? Strange thing a man can't address a few words in confidence to a friend without one of these

fellows sticking his nose in. There, I'm a-going. I ain't going to commit a burglary upon the post and walk off with the gas. I wish there wasn't a policeman on the face of the blessed earth! I'm a-going;" and in obedience to the wag of the constable's head, the old man walked on towards London-bridge; but before he was halfway there, he made another stoppage beneath a lamp.

"Now, policemen are all very well, sir," he said, "but they're too officious. Now, what did that chap do but put a stop to as fine a bit of philanthropy as was ever devised for the benefit of humanity at large? Only think, now, of the crowds of poor folks flocking there of a night! There's your proper officers to see that there's neither talking nor noise; there's your clean kitchen, with its gréat soup-coppers, and rows upon rows of mugs and basins; there's your dormitories, with their long ranges of beds, every one separate, clean hay in ticks, and a couple of warm rugs; place heated by hot-water pipes, and all orderly and regular—a place for sleep and rest, and no one allowed to disturb it; baths and

washhouses attached, and every chance given for a poor creature to get Rest, Refreshment, and a Rinse—the three graces of everyday life, sir. Open always, sir, until it was full; while the fact of a good, fair bit of work being done first or after, would keep a good many of the canting casuals away. I mean to say, sir,” said Matt, “that it might be made self-supporting after the first start; and such a place for the male and female poor of London, sir, would be an honour to the people. Now then, once more, sir, what shall we call it? ‘Hotel’ won’t do; ‘home’ won’t do; ‘hospital’ sounds too sickly. Tell you what, sir, we’ll call it ‘Space for All,’ in honour of its projector. Why, confound it, sir, I’d have it got up by a penny subscription, if my ship happened to sink and I couldn’t do it myself. And mind you, sir, I’m not going to have my money fooled away in a grand architectural building, where all the space is taken up by rooms for the officers; I want it all for the poor privates, the soldiers fighting in the war of life. I’m not going to have all my money spent in outside show; I

want it for furnishing and the inside—furnishing the inside of the building and the inside of the people. I want something plain and useful, clean and simple, with kind, quiet, firm people to attend, and see that things go right, and guard against imposition. But there, sir, we should be safe to be imposed upon some time or another, more or less; but then look at the good we should do. Ah! you may well twinkle, and laugh, and blink, old fellow, for that would be something like a job done, and one worth talking about.”

Old Matt gave the lamp a parting slap, and shuffled on towards the bridge, where he stopped in one of the recesses, and tried to get himself into a comfortable position.

“Ugh-h-h, how cold these seats are! Rich corporation like the City, too, and not have the decency to put a few cushions for a poor fellow! Just like to put stone seats round the table on Lord Mayor’s Day. Wonder how the aldermen, sheriffs, and common council would like it! Spoil their appetites, I know!”

“There,” said he after a while, as he looked over the parapet, and down at the stone steps leading to the water, “that would be a better place than this, and more quiet and sheltered. There’s t’other steps leading down to Thames-street there; but then there’s sure to be a dozen more, and I ain’t fond of company. But a fellow must sleep somewhere, so where shall it be—steps, ’Delphi arches, or the Park? Park’s too far off, and the ventilation too powerful, seeing as there’s so much water to cool the wind—makes it chilly sometimes. Rather like the Park, though; something respectable about it; genteel neighbours; soldiers on duty; air sweet; water clean. But there’s the rails to get over, and I ain’t up to rails to-night; and, besides, they tear. But there, with this suit, I could stand a tear or two as well as anyone; and I don’t s’pose I could tell myself which was the new slit if the spear-head of the rail wasn’t in it. Down the steps is all very well; but the company ain’t select, and you run the risk of being robbed. So you do down the arches; but then there’s something suitable

about them—handy to work in the morning. That's the spot for me, so here goes. Pity I came all this way, though, now the penny-boats don't run."

But the weary old man seemed in no hurry to move, for with his chin resting upon his hands, he stopped, gazing down into the hurrying black stream far beneath—black and stealthy as it hurried through the arches, lamps here and there twinkling and showing like blurred stars in the swift waters; and a stealthy, gliding race was that of the river as it bore along its stolen secrets towards the sea—secrets unknown to those who watched from far above; but there were rich spoils and treasures, dropped from the side of lighter and vessel, swept out of sewers; secrets, too, of life and death; and now and then something strange and bloated and sodden was whirled round, to rise to the surface and stare up, as if appealing with its lack-lustre eyes to the star-sprinkled heaven above—gazing fearfully upwards, but swept round again the next moment by the eddy, and forced on by the hurrying stream,

dashed against prow, borne under slimy keel, forced savagely, and entangled amongst chains, thrown upon mudbanks, and left by the tide half buried in the black ooze; swept clear again, and borne off up the river, down the river, scraping along bridge-pier or stone wharf, buttress or caisson, ever hideous, bloated, horrible—these of the river secrets glided along.

“Ah!” muttered Matt softly, “who can say that there is poverty here in London, when everywhere the gold is looking out of the great works in which it has been sunk. There are ships, ships, ships, and steamer, lighter, and barge; and how many of ’em loaded with what I should call a large fortune!” And now with a sigh he leaned his forehead upon his hands, and gazed along the river at the dimly-seen wharves and warehouses, with here and there a light flashing from the river. Then he thought of his own weary life, of Septimus Hardon and his sorrows, pondering long upon the ill-success that had attended their efforts, and seeing too plainly how ineffective they had been; and then he sighed

again loudly, and started, for a small hand was laid firmly upon his shoulder with a tight clutch, and turning quickly round, there, with the light of the gas shining full upon it, he saw as it were the face of an angel, seen through the thin veil of sin and misery that sullied its beauty—a beauty that still clung to features fair and girlish.

The strange couple gazed earnestly at one another for a few moments, when the girl spoke huskily:

“You weren’t thinking of that, were you?”

“Thinking of what, my lass?” said Matt quietly.

“Going over?” said the girl, with almost a sob, and at the same moment catching his wrist and holding it with both hands tightly, as he tried to withdraw it, while her nostrils seemed to distend, and her breath came heavily as she held him firmly, fearing lest her words might prompt him to the desperate leap.

“No, no, my lass, no,” said Matt wearily, as he sank in a sitting posture upon the stone seat. “I have thought of such a thing—time back; but



not lately. I have thought that it would be putting an end to a weary way when one gets very footsore, and that no one would miss a poor, worn-out fellow like me; but I've thought better of it, and I'll wait till I'm called, my lass. I was only thinking a bit."

"You looked as if you meant to," said the girl, loosing his wrist, and kneeling upon the seat in the very attitude the old man had taken a short time before. "But one can't help thinking of it sometimes, and almost feeling as if the river drew you like. It seems as if you'd go to sleep then, and wake no more. Not much to leave here, is there?" she added slowly.

Old Matt shook his head, and, leaning forward unseen by his companion, he took a firm hold of her dress, for the girl went on dreamily as she looked down on the black water.

"I saw one of our girls once; she went off Waterloo, and they got her out, and she looked so quiet and happy like. But there," she added in a reckless, offhand way, "I sha'n't do it, I haven't the heart. There, you needn't hold me,

old man ;” and she snatched her dress from his grasp.

A deep, hollow cough checked her for a few minutes ; and Matt sat in the cold recess gazing on the slight, graceful form, as the well-dressed girl knelt upon the seat—frail, fair, and apparently not twenty.

“Lend me threepence, old man !” she exclaimed suddenly, as she turned to him.

“What for ?” said Matt.

“Glass of brandy,” said the girl, holding her hand pressed to her side, and then battling hard once more with her cough.

“I haven’t a halfpenny left,” said Matt drearily, “or I shouldn’t be sitting here, my lass. But you’re better without the brandy, and there’s no place open now.”

“There ! I don’t want your money, old man,” said the girl ; “only one gets so used to asking, it comes natural. Are you hard up ?”

“Yes,” said Matt drearily, “close as I can be.”

“Here !” she exclaimed, holding out sixpence.

“You may as well have it, as for me to take it back.”

The old man stared at his companion for a moment, and then raised his hand to take the money, but he suddenly lowered it again.

“No, my lass, no,” he said; “thank you all the same, but I can do without it.”

The girl’s eyes flashed as she looked angrily at the old man, and then raising her hand, she dashed the money over the parapet, and sank down upon the seat sobbing violently.

“There!” she exclaimed passionately, as Matt spoke soothingly to her; “I know, and I deserve it all. I wish I was dead—I wish I was dead!”

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” said Matt kindly. “Now go home, my lass, and try and forget it.”

“Home!” said the girl, with a forced mocking laugh. “Yes, when it’s time. Good-night old man. You didn’t meet Marian, did you?”

“Who?” said Matt absently.

“Marian,” said the girl; “I’m looking for

her. But you don't know her ; good-night ;" and she went lightly off, humming the snatch of a popular air as she went towards the City ; while, after waiting until the girlish form had disappeared, old Matt rose himself and began to shuffle back the same way as he had come ; looking longingly at a passing hay-cart bound for the market, and thinking of the fragrant stack whence the load had been taken, and how pleasant it would have been to have dragged out a heap to nestle in. For the old man was cold, weary, and ill ; and as he slowly shuffled along, many a thought of those who rested upon luxurious couches came to his mind. He crossed the great echoing cathedral yard, and passed slowly from gaslight to gaslight, too weary now to talk. Now and then he would encounter a policeman, who turned to look after the slow, shambling figure. At intervals, a cab would rattle by him, while once, with its hollow, heavy rumble, a fire-engine dashed by, the light flashing back from the shining helmets of the firemen ; then there was a short, rushing vision of something red covered with figures, and drawn by

two steaming, plunging horses, a faint dying away of the hurrying wheels, and then all still once more, for it was now the most silent hour of the whole twenty-four in great London. Dull and dreary looked the streets, with hardly a wayfarer in sight, and those, perhaps, women who paced wearily along or talked noisily to a companion. But no one heeded Matt as he still shuffled onward, more than once as he passed through Fleet-street gazing up at the gas-lit windows of the newspaper-offices.

Past Lower Serles-place, looking in the dark night like the mouth of a sewer, emptying itself by the bridge—Temple Bar; past Essex-street, to stand and gaze down it for a few moments thoughtfully; past the last of the four churches, and the street leading to the “Bridge of Sighs.” Onward still, and then into one of those hilly lanes, up which in busy day came clattering the heavy teams of wagon-horses with their black load—down one of those river lanes along which came sighing the damp-laden winds, whispering of being lost upon the great stream, and of having

wandered from the green trees, where in summer the reeds rustled, and the silver water glided past emerald banks—whispering of cooling groves, and the gladdening, sparkling, dancing wavelets, sheltered woody islets, and the sweet, pure country air; but now lost in wintry weather upon the breast of the great river,—lost, after wandering by muddy pile and slimy, horrid, loathsome drain and sullyng sewer; lost, as they had swept past wharf, bridge, pier, and barge; they came in despair, weeping tears from their misty burden, sweeping amongst the gloomy houses, and causing a shiver as they passed along.

For a moment some bright recollection of the past seemed to strike the old man, and he paused thoughtfully beneath a gas-lamp; but old Matt's memories of waving reed and rustling tree were few, and he sighed and passed on, thinking only of his sought-for resting-place. Onward, and down beneath the great black yawning arch, to where he could hear voices, while above the faint damp fever-reek of the place, came the fumes of tobacco-smoke. On still, with hands outstretched

to avoid collision with cart or wagon, but more than once he tripped over a shaft, as some stabled horse rattled halter or chain through the ring of its manger, and Matt sighed with envy as he thought of the warm straw.

To a miserable fire at length, with several miserable objects huddled round, and amidst jest, laughter, and foul language, a voice yelled out a verse or two of a current song, a man and woman dancing hard by, their shadows cast, wildly distorted and grotesque, upon the reeking brickwork, where they almost seemed to cling. Then, too, came that peculiar "glug-glug" sound of liquid passing from a bottle, and a voice shouted to the old man :

"Come on, matey; heaps o' room to-night. Give's a pipe o' baccy."

"All right," replied Matt, backing into the darkness, and shaking his head, as he shuffled hurriedly along till he reached the Strand once more.

"Can't stand that now," muttered Matt; "nerves too weak. No idea there was such a

pressure of business in the hotel. Foreign gentleman that, dancing—wonder whether his organ's down there.”

Heavily, listlessly, and with drooping head, old Matt walked slowly back towards the City, now stopping in a doorway, or resting leaning against a shutter; but soon to shuffle on again, as his heart seemed to whisper, “O, that it were day once more !”

Tramp, tramp through the silent streets of the great wilderness. Thoughtful after a strange, numbed, weary mode, the old man made his way into Thames-street, looking hopelessly about the while for some dry sheltered spot, where, unnoticed by the police, he might coil up as hundreds do nightly in our streets, trying to forget the present as they wait for the coming of the desolate future.

At last, less particular now, he was nearing the dry arch of London-bridge, and thinking of the steps as a place to rest his aching bones, when, from his half-sleepy state he suddenly roused up, for down from a turning in front came a couple of



policemen with a stretcher, while, hurried and excited in her manner, her long hair lank and curlless with the dank night-wind, followed the poor girl he had seen upon the bridge, now talking earnestly to one of the constables.

The new-comers did not notice Matt, and after walking onwards for a short distance, with the old man closely following, they suddenly turned down between two large piles of warehouses, along a narrow passage up which came the odour of the river borne on the moaning wind, where the rugged broken pavement was wet and slimy.

There was no feeling of fatigue and misery now to bear down the old man, as, led by some impulse, he followed the police, his heart beating wildly as he glanced at the stretcher and recalled the hospital. There was something weird and strange-looking in the oil-caped figures as, seen in the misty darkness, they passed along; and the eager voice of the girl sounded hollow and echoing. Down to the river-side, where the muddy water could be heard rushing amidst the floating piers and moored barges, with a hurried

whispering secret sound,—here where barge and lighter were moored closely together and steamers were buoyed, waiting for the coming day. High warehouses towered above them, with cranes jutting out, gallows-like, at intervals as if just deprived of some malefactor's body that had swung to the chain, and then dropped in the river to be swept away. Piles were driven thickly here; slimy, mysterious-looking stone steps led down into the water, right down into its secret muddy depths; and an old boat or two floated hard by, secured by small chains, which rattled backwards and forwards over their gunwales as the tide lifted, and bore them to and fro in its ebbing and flowing and eddying currents.

But there was light here, sparsely shed over the scene by a single flickering lamp, whose panes seemed bedewed with tears. The pale blue flame jumped and danced, burning bluely as it was nearly extinct, and then flashed up again with regular throbs, from water collected in the pipe. And now as Matt drew nearer, he saw the light flash from the shiny wet cape of another

policeman, standing talking to a couple of non-descript waterside men in Guernsey shirts and heavy mudlark boots, who stood leaning against the mooring-posts and smoking hard; while all three seemed to be keeping vigil over something lying upon the ground covered with an old sack and some matting, upon whose uncouth form the blinking gaslight looked down; now showing its shudder-engendering proportions, now leaving it all but in darkness. But as the light flashed up, there was a tiny trickling stream sluggishly flowing from beneath the sack in a tortuous way to the edge of the landing-place, where it dripped slowly with a little echoing splash into the running waters, which beat against the stones and leaped and rose, and fell with a monotonous lap-lap as if seeking to rise, and drag back the secret taken from their bosom.

It was strange, but far off in the country, in Somesham town, Doctor Hardon clenched his hands and groaned in his sleep, as the perspiration stood in big beads upon his forehead; but though in his dream he saw the stern faces of his

brother and nephew, and went through the church-yard-scene once more, it was, perhaps, merely a fit of indignation, or on account of certain speculations which had threatened to prove failures, even though, after his fashion, he had made vows at his conscience-shrine, and promised to seek out his lost child, and to do something for Septimus Hardon should they succeed.

And 'twas strange, too, that Mrs. Doctor Hardon should wake up with a wild cry from an oppressing slumber, and then, trembling from a strange sense of dread, cry hysterically, and lie for hours thinking of her child. Strange, perhaps; but such things have been.

The policemen stopped, and set down their stretcher, saying something in an undertone to their fellow; the two men smoking left their posts, and, beneath the lamp, the girl leaned against the wall trembling visibly, as again and again she coughed and pressed her hand against her heaving chest.

Old Matt drew nearer and nearer, his claw-like fingers working convulsively, as if to tear off the

wet covering before him ; his head was craned forward, his dry lips parted, and then he stopped short as one of the men stooped and lifted the sack, so that the light flashed across a pale face “dreadfully staring through muddy impurity,” for with a wild, wailing cry, the girl started forward and threw herself on her knees, sobbing bitterly ; and the men, hardened though they were to such scenes, fell back a step or two, with some show of respect for the sorrow before them.

The wind moaned and sighed, and mingled with the poor girl’s cries ; the chains rattled noisily, and the waters seemed to leap and dash angrily at the steps, rising higher and higher minute by minute, fearful of losing their prey ; while Matt stole nearer and nearer, trembling in every limb—nearer and nearer still, with his eyes fixed upon that pale, staring face, till a policeman laid a hand upon his breast to stay him from interrupting the mourner’s sorrow ; but, putting back the hand, Matt pressed on with a chaos of thoughts hurrying through his brain, bright amongst which seemed to shine forth the face of

Lucy Grey, as, stooping lower, he now looked down upon this countenance which he had, ere now, seen raised wildly and appealingly to his, when he had gruffly talked of time, and then, shivering as if stricken with some paralysing seizure, he gasped almost to himself—

“It’s that poor girl!”

## CHAPTER X.

BY DAY.

THE public might have been present in force, but they were not; for inquests upon bodies found in Thames' stream are common events, such as find their way into corners of the morning papers in the shape of short paragraphs. And in this instance there was a very seedy-looking staff to represent the Press—namely, a man who winked solemnly at old Matt as he passed him on his way to a side-table beside the jury. The necessary witnesses were there apparently, and the inquest dragged on its slow length as they told all they knew. But Matthew Space must be quoted as an exception; he did not tell all, only that he knew the poor woman by sight, while he rightly said that he was ignorant of her name and home. It would

be time, he thought, to tell all when there was no more danger of publicity, and so he allowed himself to be huffed by the coroner for taking up his valuable time.

But now came forward a pale, well-dressed, weeping girl, who stated that her name was Eleanor.

“Eleanor what?” said the coroner, frowning very severely, and oozing all over his very high, bald forehead with the quintessence of morality; for the poor girl shivered before him, and looked appealingly from face to face of the jury-men. “Eleanor what?” said the coroner again, with quite a snap.

“Anderson,” said the girl sobbing; and then for a few minutes she could not proceed to tell her tale; how that for a year past she had always tried to see those girls who were taken out of the river. She hardly knew why, only that she had known some of them, as she knew poor Marian; and there seemed something which drew her towards the river. She met the policemen, and they let her go with them, for she was



looking for Marian, and somehow she was not surprised to find her there.

Had known her a long time — years, she thought—and they lodged together. She had often said that she was tired of life, but never talked about her friends, or anything of the past: thought she came from the country. Had not seen her before for days, and had been uneasy, and fancied she had gone over the bridge, as many did — could not tell why, unless because she was tired of her life, and had the feeling of being drawn to do it. Her name was Marian—that was what she was called — but thought it was not her real name; did not know why; but many girls like her gave themselves fresh names. She gave witness a little Bible once, with passages marked in it, but there was no name in it. Never spoke of anyone else, or of herself, but was always very kind, and had nursed witness once through a bad fever, not long back, and never left her night or day, when no one else dared come near; and now she was gone.

There was a pause here longer than those

made while the coroner had taken down the depositions, during which he had frowned very severely; and now appeared greatly annoyed at the unbusiness-like sobbing of the poor girl, who sat down again upon a form behind old Matt, who tried to whisper a few words of comfort, as the jurymen mostly seemed very intent upon the paper before them.

Then followed the doctor to tell of his horrible task, and express his opinion respecting the marks of blows upon the face of deceased, such, though, as might have been caused by striking against some part of the bridge in falling; he was of opinion that she must have struck twice, as there was a fracture upon the back of the skull; and she had evidently been dead some days.

“Found dead.”

And then there was a little quiet bustle, and scraping of chairs upon the oilcloth, for the inquest was over; and old Matt and the weeping girl were standing outside by some railings.

“Strange as we should meet again after talking as we did.”

“Yes, yes,” said the girl sadly; “but why didn’t you say you knew her when I spoke to you?”

“Didn’t know her by that name,” said Matt; “and I had only seen her a few times, hardly to speak to. But about that Bible?”

“Well!” said the girl sadly.

“Have you got it now?”

“Yes,” she said; and then she turned, for a hand was laid upon her arm, and one of the jury-men led her on a few steps talking long and earnestly, till after repeating something aloud two or three times he walked away; and Matt and the girl, two of the waifs of London streets, went slowly on, not noticing that they were watched.

“Poor, poor Marian!” sobbed the girl, stopping by a doorway. “Told me to read the words she had marked in the Bible, and then to go and do that!”

“Well, well, well,” said the old man, “let’s hope she has gone to a better world; and now, my lass, where are you going?”

“Back to my lodging,” said the girl wearily.

“That gentleman told you to call somewhere, didn’t he?” said Matt.

“Ah, yes,” said the girl abstractedly, “I think so.”

“Now I don’t believe you remember it,” said Matt; “but I happened to hear it, and I’ll write it down. Now, look here;” and he brought out his old, ragged memorandum-book and the lead-pencil stump; and then, using the crown of his hat for a desk, he wrote down the address carefully, tore out half a leaf, and gave it to the girl.

“There, my lass,” he said, “take my advice, and go there; and now I want you to let me have that Bible.”

“What for?” and the girl looked wonderingly at him.

“It’s a whim of mine, that’s all,” said Matt. “But you’ll—”

He paused, for a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and turning round he stood face to face with the juryman who had spoken to the girl.

“What paper was that you gave to the girl?” he said roughly.

“The one you ought to have given,” said Matt, resenting the question, and the tone of voice in which it was asked.

“What do you mean?” said the stranger.

Old Matt was weak and ill, or he would have retorted angrily; but he only said, “An address.”

“What address?” said the juryman dubiously.

“Well, then, yours, if you must know,” said Matt.

The juryman looked keenly at the old printer, who met his gaze without flinching. “It was easy to remember,” said the former.

“I know that,” said Matt, “but I thought she’d forget; and you seemed to mean well by the poor lass. I watched you, sir, at the inquest.”

“God knows I do, my man,” said the juryman softly; “and I ask your pardon for playing the spy; for I must confess to having had my doubts of you.”

“It’s all right, sir; and we can cry quits,”

said Matt. "I had my doubts, too; and was in two minds about writing down the address; but if you can do anything towards saving the country the cost of another inquest, for God's sake do. No, thank you, sir; I don't want your money. I don't like taking it where I haven't earned it. It's a weak point of mine, and has stood in the way of my comfort more than once: and I'm old now, sir, and can't break myself of bad habits. Good-day, sir."

The juryman smiled as they parted, and old Matt hurried off talking to himself; for the girl had disappeared while he had been detained.

"I want to see that Bible," he muttered, "and he's hindered me dreadfully. But, yes; no; yes; that's her; there she is," and he shuffled on after a slight figure he saw crossing the road, some distance down the street. "Hang the folks, how they do get in your way when you're in a hurry," he growled. "Now, stoopid, which way is it to be?" And then he hurried and panted along to overtake the retreating figure, which had again disappeared. Dodging

amongst the vehicles he encountered, he crossed the road, pressing on, with everyone he met apparently resenting his hurry, till passing a turning, he looked down, to see the figure he had followed nearly at the bottom.

“Gets over the ground well,” muttered the old man, wiping his forehead; “but I’m safe of her now. Must have that Bible; there may be some clue there, and I want to have this matter cleared up; but how can I tell Miss Lucy?”

The old man reached the bottom of the street, and stood within twenty yards of the figure he sought to overtake, when hurrying on he caught up to her, saying—

“My lass, you’ll let me have that book, won’t you?”

The figure turned sharply round, as Matt touched her shoulder lightly; but the face was strange, and, taken aback and confounded, the old man made a rough apology, and stood panting as he clung to the railings of a house hard by.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. JARKER IS WANTED.

MR. WILLIAM JARKER had had a long holiday from the public school where her Majesty's officers try to instil lessons of good, while their refractory pupils resent them to the best of their ability. So long had been Mr. Jarker's holiday, that the police had grown uncomfortable at their inability to bring something home to him, but he was wanted, at last, on account of a collection of plate and valuables that had suddenly disappeared after a few linnets and finches had been netted some thirty miles down in Hertfordshire, though even here the burglary would not have drawn Mr. Jarker into trouble had it not been for a confederate who had "peached" in consequence of what he called an unfair division of the spoil.



So Mr. Jarker was wanted just at a time when he felt very comfortable and secure. He had certainly felt rather uneasy for a few days past, and read, or rather stumbled through, the various newspapers, taking particular interest in passages relating to discoveries of bodies, and inquests, but now this uneasiness had worn off, and no further notice having been taken of his behaviour by the Hardon family, he felt in very good spirits; though for all that, he had kept away from Bennett's-rents, so that he might not encounter the Rev. Arthur Sterne, who had been assaulted, he heard; and on the principle of giving a dog a bad name and then hanging him, Bill thought he might be accused of the assault. As to the child, he learned that the curate had taken it to his own home.

Mr. Jarker's notice was drawn to the fact of his being wanted, one day when making his way from the Dials into Holborn. Naturally given to casting his eyes about him, he became aware of a quiet-looking man following him at a distance; and no sooner did Mr. Jarker catch sight of that face, than horrors of the past untold danced before

his eyes for an instant; but the next moment he thrust his hands into his pockets, drew a long breath, and began to whistle, all the while looking out ahead for what he next expected to see—a policeman in uniform.

It might be supposed that the whistler intended to give the person who followed him so closely into custody, but this was not the case, for Mr. Jarker imagined that no sooner was there a policeman in sight, than the quiet-looking man would begin to close up.

But it might be somebody else who was wanted, so Mr. Jarker crossed the road—so did the quiet man; Bill crossed again—so did the quiet man; and, though the weather was cold, the bird-catcher perspired, as he muttered—

“I wonder what it’s for?”

However, he appeared to take matters very coolly, and peeped here and there into the bird-fanciers’ shops, and so made his way into Holborn, now and then directing a peep at his quiet friend, who was apparently not taking the slightest heed of his proceedings, but all the same thoroughly

realising the difficulty of finding one of his brotherhood when wanted.

Passengers were plentiful here, and the crowd thickened as Jarker went on, till a good opportunity seemed to present itself.

“Now for it!” thought Bill, and after a glance over his shoulder, he dodged in and out and about for five minutes, making more than one feint of having turned out of the main street; then, being apparently very much taken with the contents of a draper’s window, he stopped short, and glanced to the right to find the quiet-looking man in precisely the same place, and worse still, probably in obedience to a sign from the said quiet man, to the left there was a policeman closing up quickly.

“Meant for me!” muttered Bill; and again, as he turned hotter, “I wonder what it’s for?” while once more glancing to the right, there was the quiet man also closing in quickly.

But not so quickly as Jarker made a leap backwards into the road, dodged right under a horse’s legs, round an omnibus, past cabs, carts,

and wagons, and in and out and about like an eel, invulnerable to the tread of horses' feet or the passage of wheels. Ordinary people would have been run over half-a-dozen times, but Bill Jarker was not, and on he tore, with the two constables in full chase.

Jarker had not much start, but he made the most of it, with the full determination of making his escape if possible; perhaps even for a small robbery he might have run hard, and fought hard, to avoid capture; but at the present time there was a look of desperation in his face that prevented more than one willing hand from attempting his seizure; and away he sped, in and out of the vehicles coming and going upon the slippery road. All at once he caught sight of a new peril; right in front there was another policeman, and if, to avoid him, he took to the pavement, so great was the crowd of passengers, that he must have been hemmed-in and captured directly. So on dashed Jarker, right at the constable in front, coming down upon him with the impetus of a battering-ram. Over he went, and on dashed Bill with the

other constables in close pursuit, and shouts and cries rising on all sides. "Stop thief! stop thief!" with the tail of followers increasing each moment.

Jarker's breath came hot and thick, and he felt that a few more minutes past, and he would be marching through the street handcuffed and with his liberty stopped; he thought no more of that, but shuddered, while, at the same moment, hope animated his breast, for he could see, far in front, a haven of safety: right before him the street was up, and the boards and bricks told of repairs to the sewers, while the large heap of earth pointed out the depth down at which they lay.

On tore Jarker, racing over the ground with a long, loping run, and on came the police, with the tag of idlers; but the goal was reached. With one bound Jarker cleared the barrier, ran and stumbled over the loose earth for some distance, and then dropped to the first platform, slid down ladder after ladder, passed man after man, too astonished and startled to attempt to seize him, sometimes falling, sometimes climbing, with the

deal planks springing, and brickbats and clods of earth falling after him. One man made a blow at him with his spade, but it came too late, for Jarker reached the bottom, leaped into the black stream, here but little over his knees, went splashing away under the echoing dark arch of the sewer, into the dense black passages that run for so many miles under London, and was out of sight long before the first policeman was half-way down the great opening.

The main sewers were not made in those days, and the quiet man stopped for an instant to give some instructions to one of his constables, the result being that he leaped into a hansom cab, and very soon after, as the tide was up, a Thames-police row-galley was being pulled slowly backwards and forwards in front of the mouths of two large openings which lent their black, affluent streams to the great river.

On through the darkness went Jarker, always with the stream, his hands outstretched in front, and his head turned from time to time to catch a glimpse of the flash of some bull's-eye lantern.

On he pressed, but not unpursued ; since for some distance a couple of policemen, the one in plain clothes and he who had been knocked down and made vicious by the blow, came plashing along.

Once the ruffian stopped, drew out a heavy life-preserver, and with an oath turned back, but directly after he was pressing on again, carefully feeling his way by the slimy wall, for the water grew deeper and deeper, and more than once his quick ear detected the light scuffling noise as of some little animal running, and a plash as of something leaping into the murky stream.

At last Jarker stopped, for the long-continued silence and the thick darkness taught him that he was unpursued ; but he knew well enough that though the pursuit had perhaps ceased, the entrances to the sewers would be carefully watched ; and he felt too now that there would be no home for him again in Bennett's-rents.

“ They're gallus clever !” growled the ruffian when, after pressing on a little further, he once more stopped short—“ they're gallus clever, them p'lice, but they don't know everythink.”

And now, after listening long and carefully, he turned off short round to the right, and waded onward for a few minutes, when he stopped again to draw forth a box and light a match ; but he found that they were wetted, and nothing followed but faint streaks of phosphorescent light ; when with a curse he threw the useless splints away and pressed on.

Dark, plashing, echoing paths, with noisome mephitic smells and the sound of hurrying waters—paths that might in ignorance be traversed for days and days, until the weary wanderer sank down for the black stream to bear him out to the great river. Here there would be a smaller sewer off to the right, here one to the left ; while drain-pipe and culvert emptied their filthy streams, augmenting always the larger sewer where the ruffian waded ; as the current swelled and rose and rolled swiftly on, at times with almost sufficient force to render his footing insecure.

At one time the water was up to his breast, but it soon shallowed when he entered a branch



and faced the stream, guiding himself ever with his hand upon the slimy wall, as if thoroughly acquainted with his road, and proceeding the while at no mean rate along the gloomy way; for Jarker had been here before, and he pressed on fearless of darkness or rats, thinking that the only danger that could assail him would be a rush of water after a heavy rain. At times, though, he stopped splashing and beating the stream, and imitating the snapping, snarling bark of a dog, for something would run scratching over him—then another, and another—keen, hunger-bitten little animals; then there followed splash after splash, as they leaped into the water. Now he was clear of them again, and stopped puzzled, feeling along the wall on both sides for something he could not find—some guide-mark or open sewer-mouth; but now again came the little eager animals, hunger-driven and fierce, crowding and swimming round him, swarming up his back and breast, and biting sharply with their little keen teeth as the wretch leaped and bounded about, tearing half-a-dozen off to make room for a score.

“ If I only had one of their gallus lights !” shrieked the ruffian, forgetful of the risk of being heard, and of the *ruse* he had before successfully practised, and in the horror of his position ready even to have given himself up as he cursed and yelled in a frightful manner—the hideous noises echoing along the vaulted sewer, and sounding doubly frightful.

“ Curse ’em ! I shall be gnawed to death !” shrieked Jarker, as he could not help recalling the times when he had gloated with delight over the performances of some steel-teethed terrier in a pit amidst a dozen rats ; and now, as he fought there, splashing about in the water, and tearing off rat after rat to crush them in his powerful hands, he could not but feel how the tables were turned, and groaned piteously as a great dread came upon him—a horror blacker than the black darkness around. But Jarker fought on savagely for his life, while the diminutive size of his adversaries formed their protection again and again. He had his life-preserver out now, and struck with it at random, fierce and heavy blows, each of

which would have beaten the life out of a dozen rats, but only once or twice had they any effect, and then he struck the brick side of the sewer, when the lead knob was loosened and fell from the whalebone handle into the rushing water, and with a curse Jarker dashed the useless fragment away.

Faint and harassed, his great brute strength of no avail, his hands and face streaming with blood, Jarker now made a fierce rush up stream ; but his progress was slow with the water so deep ; when, as if fearing to lose their prey, the rats redoubled their efforts and leaped upon him furiously, till, half-mad with the horror of their fearful assault, one he had never known before in his many sewer wanderings through having been provided with a light, Jarker drew in a long breath, exhaled it again, thoroughly inflated his lungs as he beat off his assailants, and then plunged beneath the water, groping his way slowly up stream, and keeping under the foul water for nearly a minute, when he raised his head for breath, and plunged under again and again.

His plan succeeded ; for, evidently at a loss, the tribe of rats had gone down with the stream ; and then he was alone and afraid to stir, lest he should bring them back, as he stood panting and dripping with the noisome water, and leaned against the slippery wall.

“ I did say as I'd keep a dawg,” growled Jarker at last ; “ and if I'd ha' had one—” And then he burst out into a hideous string of oaths and curses at what he called his ill luck, as, after listening for some time, he resumed his way in the echoing subterranean labyrinth, trembling lest the rats should have heard his voice.

But he did not go far before he stopped as if puzzled, and stood thinking, and listening to the rush of the stream and the trickling of drain after drain as it emptied itself into the main current, itself but a tributary of a greater. He dared not retrace his steps on account of the rats, but went slowly on ; stopped, went on again ; stopped once more to scratch his dripping head ; and then he gave a leap and a cry of terror as he felt an enemy swim up once more and try to effect a lodgment.

Then he hurried forward through the dense black darkness, then back a little way in a strange, excited way, tearing and splashing about furiously as a new horror assailed him ; and at last muttering low blasphemies, muttering them in a low whisper lest they should be heard by the rats, he made another push on for many yards, cursing the police, the rats, and his ill luck. Once he stumbled and fell with a heavy splash, to be swept along over and over by the stream before he recovered his footing to stand half-drowned and clinging to the bricks, giving vent now to a whimpering, sobbing howl, that seemed as if it had come from a dog ; for, with his courage gone and his head in a whirl, he stood now in the intense darkness afraid to move, as his imagination peopled the sewers around him with horrors at the very thought of which he shuddered ; for in spite of scores of rambles in these subterranean channels, with whose many turns he had considered himself perfectly familiar, Bill Jarker had lost his way.

\* \* \* \* \*

The police turned back after pursuing Jarker for a short distance along the sewer; but though not disposed to follow him along the dark subway, they had not given him up, for the outlets were carefully watched both by the places where repairs were going on and also at the mouths in the Thames' bank; while, after proper arrangements had been made, the sewers were searched that night with lanterns; the principal man engaged more than once announcing in a very loud voice, which went echoing along the arched ways, that he (Jarker) might just as well give up as be starved out; but for all that, Mr. Jarker was not found.

"Not much use hunting along here," muttered one man to another; "here's a hundred places where he could hide till we got by."

"Remember that poor chap we found just here, Joe?" said one man, evidently quite at home in the place—a rough fellow in a Guernsey shirt and high boots, and wearing a hair-mask.

"Ah," said another, "well."

"What was that?" said the quiet man, who was also here.

“Chap we found all along here,” said the other, “and brought him out in a basket.”

“Basket?” said the quiet man.

“Ah!” said the other; “bones lying all along here; trod on ’em as you went—picked clean.”

“Pooh, nonsense!” said the quiet man, who had not shuddered before for at least ten years.

“Right enough,” said the other sulkily; “rats!”

“Here, let’s get out,” said the quiet man, “we are doing no good;” and he made the light of his bull’s-eye lantern play along the surface of the water to where he could just see a little head above the stream as its owner swam rapidly away, leaving an ever-widening track behind. “Let’s get out; it’s no use to go splashing along here; if he isn’t drowned, all we can do is to wait for him.”

“He ain’t drowned,” said a policeman, thrusting his lantern up a drain and peering in; “he’s too much of a rat hisself, and I wouldn’t mind laying that he’s worked his way up to light before now.” And the man stopped, gazing up the

black noisome channel before him as if it possessed some attraction.

“Gone up there, safe,” said the quiet man, laughing. “Go up, Tom, and see; I’ll wait for you.”

“Officers allus goes fust to lead the way, and privates follers,” said the policeman. “Nice place, though, ain’t it?”

“Whereabouts are we now?” said the quiet man.

“Don’t zackly know,” said the man in the hair mask. “Not far from Holborn, I should say.”

“Going up there, Tom?” said the quiet man, unscrewing the top of a small dram-flask.

“Arter you, sir,” said the policeman.

The quiet man took the “arter you” to apply to the dram-flask, which he passed to his follower; and as no one seemed disposed to crawl on hands and knees along the narrow place, the party slowly retraced their steps to where they had descended, and it was with a feeling of relief that they found themselves once more in the clear night-air.



## CHAPTER XII.

### WHAT MA MERE KNEW.

“You mad fool, Jean! you shall listen, and you shall hear all,” cried *ma mère* furiously; “and I will torment you till you see that you are *bête*. The little worker—the pink doll—is not for you; and you shall not have her. But it was good sport, Jean—rare sport, Jean. That sniff woman, poor fool! told me. He carried her down the stairs—carried her down in his arms, of course, for he loves her; and let him marry her if he will; who cares? for she is not for you. Do you hear, *bête*? he carried her lovingly down in his arms.”

Jean winced as he sat in his old place at the window, but pretended not to hear, though from the working of his nostrils it was plain how eagerly he drank in every word.

“No, Jean, she is not for you,” cried the old woman. “I hate her, and you shall not love her, but someone else; for she has always set you against me. I know—I know all—all—all!” she exclaimed, muttering and nodding her head; “he struck down the Jarker—big wretch; and then the Jarker waited hour after hour, hour after hour, into the dark night, and watched for him till he was talking to the painted woman, and struck him down too; and then I saw more too, and I was not going to tell—O no—though I think he killed her. But no, no, Jean, I would not tell, for I have my plans; and pah! there are plenty more painted women. But no, no, Jean, you shall not have the pink doll. You must love me, Jean, till I tell you to marry.”

The young man writhed in his chair, but he spoke no word; while his mother knitted furiously, clicking her needles and smiling maliciously as she watched him sideways.

“No, no, Jean, you shall not have the pink doll; and you cannot see her now—they are gone.”

“But she will come,” cried Jean angrily, with something of his mother’s spirit bursting forth.

“No, no!” half-shrieked his mother; “she shall not—I will not have her. But no, she will not come, you *bête*, for the preacher is ill with the Jarker’s blow, and she nurses him and smooths his pillow. Fool!” she cried in a sharp, cracked voice, “I will torment you to death if you tear not the hateful little thing from your foolish heart. You shall only love me till I tell you. But now listen: it is dark now, and I have my plans. The Jarker is away, and the police hunt him. Now listen, fool, while I tell you. They may take him, but I hope not yet; for you shall be rich, Jean—you shall have money and all that the great people have, and plenty of fine dolls shall be proud to have you, Jean; for I am proud of you; and what was she? Bah! nothing. I know the Jarker’s secret—I know it two years; but he does not think it, for I have been still and waited two years, Jean—more. He suspect me once, but he dare not touch me, and I have given

him no chance since. And should I tell till it was time? No, no!"

*Ma mère* leaned over towards her son, and casting down her knitting in her eagerness, one of the dogs ran to pick it up, but she struck the poor thing angrily with Jean's crutch, and it ran yelping back to its corner. And now she whispered long and eagerly in the young man's ear, till his cheek flushed and eyes sparkled, for he was coupling all he heard with the name of Lucy Grey.

"Gold and silver—much silver and rich things, Jean," hissed *ma mère*.

"But have you seen them?" cried Jean eagerly.

"Bah! no; but what then? Why was he out night after night? To catch birds? Bah! no, but to pluck birds of their fine feathers, gay feathers, rich feathers, and he has a store, I know it."

"But he may come back," said Jean huskily.

"Do I not say the police hunt him? They have been here to seek him," hissed his mother;

and when I have taken his honey I will show his empty nest, and they will send him to the galleys. Yes, yes. But come, fool. There," she said, kissing him, "thy *mère* loves thee, Jean. No, no, lean on me ; you must leave the crutch, it is noisy. No, no, he dare not come back here to be taken."

*Ma mère* placed a piece of candle in her pocket, along with a box of matches. She then led Jean to a chair by the door, left him seated, and went softly back to the window, which she opened, and then gazed down into the court and anxiously at the windows where there were lights. Then once more closing the window, she returned to her son, opened the door, and listened. But there were voices on the stairs, so thrusting Jean back, she leaned over the balusters to try and hear who waited below, but without avail, so she returned to the room.

"But we will be rich, Jean—rich," she whispered, "and there shall be no more of this pinching for bread. You shall not have poor workers but ladies glad to see you smile, *mon fils*," and

the old woman cast her lean arms round the cripple's neck, kissing him fondly, though he remained thoughtful and impassive, apparently listening to the impatient movements of some sleepless bird.

“But listen, Jean—it was very horrible; but I saw all, and I shall tell some day when it is time. I saw the Jarker strike the preacher down, for I had been watching too. I came back late, and saw the Jarker and hid myself; because he is a savage, and I would not meet him by night never since I knew his secret; but when I was hid, and he had struck down the preacher, I saw him run this way to cross the road, but the painted woman dash at him and hold him, fighting fiercely with him, till I would have helped her—but I was old and weak, Jean. Then he struck her down, Jean—such a coward, cruel blow—but she clung to his legs, and he kicked her, so that I hear his boot upon her poor head, and I felt sick, Jean, but I dare not speak; and as he came closer I shrunk in the doorway and watched, for he ran into the court; but the

painted woman was up, and ran again, and caught hold of him, and held on, and I could hear her say just inside the court there, 'Give me my child, give me my child!' and he struck her down again. But once more she held to his legs gasping, and saying, 'My child, give me my child!' and in her fierce, angry way she seemed to crawl and wind up him like a serpent, while—ah, Jean, I am old and coward, and I shivered and trembled to see it all. There was no noise, only the fierce whisper, 'Give me my child!' and the struggling, and I saw him strike at her again and again in the face, while she held her poor head down in his breast that he should not hit her; till at last they fell, and I heard her poor head strike the stones, and I sink down on the passage-floor, Jean, for I could not bear it, and I don't know how long for, but when I look out again there was nothing in the court—nothing but the miserable light—and I dare not go out and see, Jean, for I was frightened. I think perhaps he killed her, poor painted woman, and I am sorry, for she loved her child as I love you, Jean, and

would die for you ; but stop, and then the police shall know, and they will take him—but not yet. Poor painted woman ! I have not seen her since, and the preacher has her child. And it is not ungrateful like you, Jean. Ah ! do I not cry long hours for you, and you do not mind, for you think always of the doll, and I hate her. She coaxed you from me with her soft white skin and her cat's ways. She is deceitful, and tries to make the preacher marry her ; but he shall not yet, for I will tell him something that shall frighten him. But there, bah ! let him marry her, and take, too, her old imbecile of a father and the weak, crying mother—let him marry them all. But you—you shall be rich, Jean, and keep no more birds. You shall have doctors, and get rid of your crutch, and people will be proud to know you.”

But Jean spoke not ; only sat listening to his mother's words as he built up some bright future and thought of Lucy Grey.

At last *ma mère* rose again from the seat she had taken, and went to the head of the stair-



case; but still there were voices to be heard, and this time, without coming back, she sat down with her pinched check leaning against the balusters, where she remained patiently listening for quite an hour, when she softly rose and whispered to Jean as she supported him; and then slowly and painfully the strange couple made their way down to the passage, where, after waiting for a few minutes, they crossed the empty court and stood in the dark entry of the opposite house.

Late as it was—nearly twelve—the door stood open; but even if the old woman's catlike step and the slow painful shuffle of her son had been heard, they would have excited no attention, as stealthily she helped Jean along, until they stood at the head of the cellar-steps.

“Ah!” hissed *ma mère* as she kicked against something soft, “but it is that Bijou who has followed us.—Back, then!” she hissed, striking at the dumb brute, whose soft patter was now heard along the dark passage as the animal scuffled away. “Now, mind,” whispered *ma mère* as they descended slowly, while once Jean slipped

and nearly dragged the old woman headlong to the bottom; but he saved himself by grasping the rough railing, and after recovering his panting breath another trial was made, and they stood at the bottom, when, feeling her way along, *ma mère* led him till, still in the dark, they stood in the front cellar, where the water dripped hollowly into the tub. But the woman well knew her way; and, with one arm round her son, she helped him along to the arch, warned him of the step down, and so drew him into the back-cellar and along to the end, where she left him leaning against one of the bins while she stole softly back to the cellar-steps to listen for awhile before returning to strike a match and light her piece of candle, which she screened by holding it far into the bin.

“No, Jean,” she muttered, “he dare not come back, for there is a police always on the watch for him, though I have not told. But, hush! don’t speak,” she whispered, as a heavy step was heard to pass along the court; and all the while the light shone strangely upon her sharp

withered features and the sallow face and wild eyes of Jean. "Hold this now," she said softly, and once more she went nimbly back to the cellar-door to listen, when, closing it gently, she hurried to the side of her trembling son. "You fool!" she muttered sneeringly, "you shake, and there is nothing to fear. Now hold the candle low, and shade it with your coat;" and then, going down upon hands and knees, she crawled into the bin before her—one that was deep and narrow; and, panting and sighing with the exertion, she scraped away a little of the blackened sawdust, and thrust her hands beneath what appeared to be the brick end of the bin, lifted it a little and then thrust sideways, when the whole back slowly slid along, disclosing an opening which the whitewashed stone had before covered.

A little more hard thrusting and Jean could see that there was apparently room to pass into what appeared to be another cellar, while a cold, damp, foul-smelling vapour rushed through, and nearly extinguished the candle.

"Come, quick, Jean," panted *ma mère*, mak-

ing her way through the opening, when Jean crawled into the bin and handed her the guttering candle before following her through the hole, against which he kneeled hesitating; but directly after he crept through and stood beside his mother in a little cellar surrounded by bins similar to those in the one they had left; then, having stuck the candle amongst the loose damp sawdust, *ma mère* drew the stone flag back into its place, for it ran in a rough brick groove at the bottom, while at the top it was kept from falling by a large iron bar roughly laid in a couple of staples.

“Now look, now look,” hissed *ma mère*, taking the candle in her hands and peering about; “wine, old wine in bottles, put here and forgotten; and what is this?—my faith, it is a melting-pot;” and she paused curiously by a large black-lead crucible, fitted upon a rough brick furnace, whose chimney was a piece of iron piping, carried up apparently into one of the house flues. By its side in an old box was a quantity of charcoal; and in another several pounds of saltpetre, evidently used to augment the fierceness

of the fire, while by the side lay a pair of bellows—instruments which had before now caused angry words to issue from Mr. Jarker's lips. "Now look, Jean; but what ails you, fool? Look at the boxes; there, that is where the rich things are;" and her lean fingers clutched and clawed and opened and shut as she held a hand out towards a rough chest.

Jean was gazing with astonished eyes around him at the gloomy place; at the bins half full of empty bottles; at a couple of boxes that lay in one; but, as his mother spoke, he was leaning towards one corner of the cellar where there seemed to be an opening, which was lightly covered with an old box-lid.

"What is that?" he whispered.

"What? fool!" exclaimed *ma mère*, going to the lid and lifting it; when the foul wind rushed up, and once more nearly extinguished her candle. "Pah!" she ejaculated; "a way down into the drains, and O, my faith, Jean, but it is the rat's hole; but," she chuckled, "he dare not come, the ferrets and dogs are after him, and he

will soon feel their teeth. So, my faith ! he had two holes.”

As she spoke she hastily closed the place once more, listening the while to a musical trickling noise which came whispering up ; but, led by some strange impulse, Jean went down upon his knees by the hole, and lifted the lid again, peering down into the black darkness, and listening to the hollow echoing noise, while from apparently a distance came a rushing sound as of a stream through a large sewer, and the young man shuddered as he listened to its strange wild cadence.

“ Come here, fool ! ” hissed *ma mère*; “ come, hold the candle ; ” and broken glass crackled beneath her feet as she crossed the cellar towards a box in one of the bins. “ Come, Jean, here are the treasures, boy ; but O, look here ! It is what I thought : here is the painted woman’s veil ; ” and she picked up a small net fall, that had evidently from its torn appearance been snatched hastily from a bonnet. “ He must have dragged her down here, Jean ; and then—there is that hole ! ”

Mother and son stayed gazing at one another with dilated eyes and parted lips, till, dropping the lid, Jean crawled shuddering away, as an echoing sound came up caused by the falling cover. Mother and son seemed fascinated for a few moments, as they pictured in their own minds the scene that might have taken place in the damp cavernous place where they stood ; and then, forgetful of her main object, *ma mère* crept closer to her son.

“But it is very horrible !” she murmured ; and as she spoke she wiped her forehead with the scrap of lace in her hand, but only to throw it down with a shudder the next moment.

“Do you think he killed her, then ?” whispered Jean in a harsh dry voice.

“Hush ! don’t speak, don’t talk of it,” hissed the old woman, who seemed quite unnerved, and trembled violently.

“But where do the drains go to ?” whispered Jean.

“Into the big river,” said *ma mère* ; “but come quick, there are the boxes, Jean, and let

us get away from here. I hardly breathe. But O, my faith, look there !”

Jean Marais gave a cry of horror as he clutched his mother’s gown ; and then they remained silent for a few moments.

The candle had burned out !



## CHAPTER XIII.

### PEACE.

WHAT were the thoughts of Aunt Fanny as she ushered in Lucy Grey, the bearer of her answer to a note she had received? Strange thoughts, no doubt—thoughts of the time when her own hands were like her cheeks, plump and soft, and dimpled; but she said no word, only kissed the visitor tenderly, held her in her arms a minute to gaze in the blushing face, and then with a sigh, half of pleasure, half sorrowful, she led the way to the door and opened it for the humbly-dressed girl—nay, not humbly dressed, for Heaven had clothed her with a beauty that in a higher sphere would have been called peerless. Aunt Fanny then closed the door, and went back to the sitting-room to

smoothe the stiff plaits of her poplin and black apron, and shed a few tears.

Aunt Fanny stood by the window gazing into vacancy, but her look could not penetrate to where Lucy was kneeling, like some fair penitent, beside the easy-chair where Arthur Sterne sat propped up by pillows. There was a desire to flee again when once she was there, but Lucy's hands were prisoned, and even for a time the eyes were downcast; but then those words, powerful in their eloquence—words which made the young girl's heart beat quickly—had their effect, and soon the flushed face was raised, and in the long unflinching gaze that met his own, there was all that doubting man could desire.

Ah, Arthur Sterne, you may have mumbled so that poor Aunt Fanny had to move her seat in church, but there was something now in the true eloquence of your words that must have thrilled the heart of the fair girl by your side; for the tears of happiness fell fast as her face was buried in your breast.

Explanations? Yes, all he could wish for;

and how could he blame the loving tender heart, which saw not as the world saw, but was ready to stretch forth her hand to help the lost soul struggling in the slough of sin? How could he blame as he listened to the story of Agnes Hardon's sorrow, and how she had made herself known, begging again and again so earnestly, as she asked Lucy's protection for her child, that Septimus or Mrs. Hardon might never be told of their intimacy, lest they should be of the world worldly, and cast the wretched woman from this last hold upon something pure?

Explanations! ay, many; and could he have done so he would have knelt to Lucy, as, weeping, she whispered to him of her wounded heart, and of how gladly she would have told him all, but that she feared his condemnation and contempt.

But there, love-scenes should be matters of the strictest privacy; and if Arthur Sterne gazed long and lovingly in the pure candid face before him with a look of fond protection which saw nothing then in humbleness or poverty, and Lucy Grey returned that look with one from

her tear-wet eyes, that saw in his face everything that was great, noble, and to be desired by the tender, untouched heart of woman—if these two joined their lips in one long kiss of love, why it seems to be only natural, and what might be expected under the circumstances.

“And poor Agnes?” whispered Lucy from where she nestled.

“Have you not seen her since?” said the curate.

And then followed much long happy planning for the future, in which Agnes Hardon and her little golden-haired child had their share, and Somesham was more than once mentioned in connection with reconciliations.

Time will fly at such times, and after Arthur Sterne had told of his arrangements that he had already made for the child, and once more related his interview with Agnes, smiling at the pain of Lucy as he lightly touched upon his mishap, one that he gloried in as he felt the maiden’s soft cheek laid to his throbbing heart—after all this, and much more that both had forgotten as soon as

spoken, the curate discovered that the interview had lasted more than two hours, though much of that time had been spent in a silence that neither felt disposed to break—a silence quite in unison with the doctor's orders, since he had left instructions that for some days yet the patient was to be kept perfectly undisturbed.

But there is an end to all things, and Arthur Sterne did not look much the worse for his visitor, when Aunt Fanny tapped gently at the door to announce another in the shape of Septimus Hardon come to escort his step-child back to their new home.

And that night, upon her way back, the something new that appeared to have come over the spirit of Lucy Grey was more than ever manifest; the ever-anxious look had departed, and her step was light, bounding, and elastic as she walked on by Septimus Hardon's side; a strange contrast—now quiet and hopeful, now elate and light-hearted, as she conversed, while every topic was tinged with the future.

“And what did Mr. Sterne want?” said Septimus as his eyes twinkled, half from merriment, half from sadness, as he drew the graceful arm he held farther through his own.

Lucy was serious in a moment, and as she turned beneath a street-lamp and looked in her stepfather’s face, he abused himself roundly, for he could see tears glittering in the bright eyes that met his own.

“Don’t, don’t ask me, dear,” whispered Lucy. “Don’t talk of it now, for indeed, indeed, I could not leave you.”

“Hush, hush,” whispered Septimus soothingly, for they passed another post, and he could this time see how fast the tears were falling, and now he tried to change the conversation.

“But he’s getting better now very fast, eh? my darling,” whispered Septimus.

“O, yes, yes,” murmured Lucy. “I think so.”

“And — but there, I’m making you worse. Let’s talk of something else.”

But Septimus Hardon’s attempts at starting

fresh subjects for conversation were one and all failures, and Lucy was silent until they reached Essex-street; though hers were not tears kindred to those she had shed days—weeks—months back, and, as to her dreams that night, they must have been sweet to cause so happy a smile to play upon her lip; for though a tear once stole from the fringed lid, and lay like a pearl upon her cheek, it did not seem like a tear wrung from the heart, neither did the sigh which followed betoken sorrow; for it was a sigh like that sweet expiration some of us have heard when a confession has been wrung from lips we love, and those lips, when pressed, have hardly been withdrawn, but pouted sweetly, looking more ruddy for shame.

Only yesterday that they wore that look; it can't be further back than the day before, or, say last week; and—the sweet recollection clings—“There, I do wish to goodness, dear, you would not always make a point of firing off into conversation directly I sit down to read or write. *Now* what is it? ‘Young Fitzpater was too atten-

tive to Maude last night?' Pooh! nonsense! sugar-candy! Why, the child isn't seventeen yet, and—"

That could not have been last week, after all. How time does fly!



## CHAPTER XIV.

### IN THE RAT'S HOLE.

“HUSH!” cried *ma mère*, recovering from her tremor; “but I have another piece. You fool, Jean! are you afraid to be in the dark? Here is the candle, but where are the matches?” and the old woman kept on feeling about in her huge pocket, but found them not. “You have the matches, Jean!” she exclaimed at last.

“No,” said the cripple; “you had them, *ma mère*.”

“Ah, yes; and I left them in the other place; but I will fetch them. Where are you?”

“I am here,” whispered Jean, whom the darkness seemed to oppress, so that he could not speak above his breath.

“But where?” hissed his mother. “I cannot tell, not yet; where is the stone?”

“Don’t move,” whispered Jean hoarsely; “there is the hole, and you will fall down.”

“Then, come you,” hissed his mother; “we cannot stay here in the dark; and I am not come to go back with empty hand.”

“What can I do?” cried Jean angrily. “I am afraid to move. Why did you not let me have my crutch?” And now he began to feel slowly along the wall in search of the stone, but his hands only came in contact with the brick bins and empty bottles.

“Have you found the opening, Jean?” whispered his mother from the other side of the cellar; and then a cold shudder ran through the cripple as he stood with his hand upon the stone, for there was the sound of someone falling over a piece of board, and *ma mère* shrieked out, “O, *mon Dieu*, I am lost!” while standing there in the fearful darkness, and knowing his own helplessness, Jean almost swooned with horror.

“Here, quick, Jean, your hand!” cried his

mother huskily ; and on crawling towards the sound, Jean clutched his mother's arms, and dragged at her, for she was lying with part of her body in the hole, but in no real danger, though unnerved and terrified, her fancy having magnified the peril a hundredfold before she lay panting on the damp sawdust beside her son.

"Not deep, not deep," she muttered ; "but, ah, Jean, it was very dreadful ! I felt as if the painted woman was dragging me down."

"Hush !" whispered Jean as they crawled farther away ; "what is that noise ?"

"*Bête !* would you frighten me ?" hissed the old woman ; and then she paused, for now distinctly heard, and as if ascending into the cellar through the hole, came a low blowing, panting noise ; at first very soft, then louder and louder, as it came mingled with a plashing, scraping sound ; nearer and nearer, and more plainly, as if someone was forcing a way along ; while, at last, the panting noise was almost painful, for it was as of some hunted animal fighting for its breath.

Nearer and nearer came the noise ; and with blood seeming to freeze and grow sluggish in their veins, mother and son crept farther away from the hole, till they crouched, clinging together, against one of the bins, when Jean's elbow came in contact with an empty bottle, which clinked loudly. And still nearer came the sound, more rustling, more loud panting, echoing and hollow, as if sent through some large pipe ; and, hardly daring to breathe, as they listened to the heavy throb, throb of their hearts, mother and son waited the result.

Now there was a muttering noise heard along with the panting ; then more rustling, and all louder and plainer ; till, as mother and son crouched there with starting eyes, they could in imagination see a dripping figure emerge from the hole, and stand within a few feet of them.

Then there was a silence so horrible that to the trembling couple it seemed worse than the coming of the noises. But there was relief at last in the sound as of one searching amongst bottles ; and then the snap as of the opening

of a box, followed by the striking of matches, first one and then another. The sweat gathered upon the listeners' faces as they thought of the result of the discovery, and the probable fate of her whose veil they had seen. But, as in the sewer, nothing but faint lines of light ensued, and tiny spots where the damp matches were thrown; when, as if to show that this was no supernatural visitant, a deep husky voice growled the word "damp!" as the box was thrown impatiently down.

Then a heavy foot crunched upon Jean's hand, which he had rested upon the ground to thrust himself close to the wall; but though the pain was acute, he uttered no cry, sitting almost frozen with fear, as he heard the click of a bottle, the breaking of glass, the trickling of liquid upon the floor, followed by the sound of someone drinking; taking a long breath; drinking heavily again and again; and then something struck the young man heavily, his face was splashed with wine, and a broken bottle fell upon the floor.

Once more there was the silence, only broken by the heavy breathing of the new-comer; and then the hearts of mother and son bounded as they heard first the gliding of a hand upon a wall, and then a rough grating, which they both recognised as that of the stone being very softly and slowly slid back for a few inches, while it appeared that the new-comer was listening; and once more in the painful silence it seemed certain that he would hear the laboured beating of their hearts.

Once again, though, there was the grating, and they could tell that the opening was now fully exposed; then followed the rustling as of a body passing through, and, as they listened, the faint fall of steps passing along the court fell upon their ears, seeming refreshing, as it linked them once more with things of the upper world; but the next moment came the rustling sound, then the grating of the stone, and once more all was silent as the grave.

“ Ah!” sighed *ma mère* with almost a groan, as

she once more breathed freely; while in a husky voice Jean whispered, "Let's go."

"Stop," whispered his mother; "I dare not move yet. He will not be gone; only waiting for a chance to get past the police; and if he see us he will hide his rich things;" and the thought of the contents of the place seemed to lend force to the old woman's failing nerves; though, for what seemed half an hour to Jean, they sat in the silent darkness, waiting; a silence broken now and then by a peculiar sighing noise from the sewers, which made its hearers shudder.

"Was it him?" whispered Jean at last.

"Yes; the Jarker," hissed *ma mère*; "but get up now. Let me help you, and we will take all we can and go. Be still and careful; and there, now you are up. But, my faith, Jean, I am cramped! Now, the boxes were here; and—"

*Ma mère* ceased speaking, and stood trembling, with the sense as of something lifting the hair of her bare head, for at that moment came the sound of the grating stone pushed quickly aside;

there was the sharp rustling as of one passing through, and the stone was thrust back, while the old woman could hear the panting, hard breath of someone close to her. She would have crouched away, but she stood as if paralysed, calling up the old interview with Jarker in the front cellar, and his great knife and ominous words, and she felt now that her hour was come, as a voice muttered the words "Two there!" and a heavy hand was laid upon her bare head. It was a horrible moment; but she could not move, and stood with her tongue glued to her palate, waiting for what she felt must follow; though, could she have turned, she would have clasped her withered arms round the ruffian, and cried to her son to escape. But *ma mère* was motionless, while the hideous yell that now rang in a dull, smothered way through the vault froze her blood into stagnation. Still the hand was not moved, but lay motionless upon her head, trembled and shook violently for a few moments, and then the old woman was free; for, in a horrible voice, the ruffian shrieked:



“Come back! come back!” when there was a heavy crash as of a body falling amongst a quantity of broken bottles, and all was silent once more.

No word spoke *ma mère*, but catching her son's hand, she drew him after her to the opening, seized the stone, which seemed to glide away at her touch, and then she thrust hurriedly at Jean as he crawled through, one hand being stretched back to seize on Jarker, should he recover from his swoon and try to touch her boy. Then she felt that there was room, and crept through herself, closed the stone with some difficulty, and made her way shuddering out into the cellar. Here *ma mère* clutched Jean round the waist, and stopped to listen, but all was silent and apparently no pursuit, so hurrying him along, they stood trembling once more in the passage, expecting to be seized from behind, *ma mère* seeming to feel the knife of Jarker, as she clutched at her throat and pressed on. Upon passing out into the court, though, there was a policeman, but beyond a glance, he took no heed of them till they had entered their own passage and closed the door,

when he quietly made his way through the entrance they had that moment quitted.

“Cognac, Jean ; drink it, fool, you want it,” said *ma mère*, when they were once more safe in their own room. Before she would partake herself, the old woman forced some upon her son. “Another time, though, Jean, another time. I thought he would not dare to come back ; but he will go now, and it will be safe. My faith, though, to see those boxes and touch nothing !” she exclaimed, and her hands clawed again as she spoke. “No, Jean, he will come no more, for it was as I thought ; he is a murderer, and afraid. He did kill the poor painted woman ; and then he was frightened, and thrust her poor body down into the sewer. But he was frightened, and fainted away, for he thought it was his poor victim come back. Did you not hear him shriek it ? But I will tell the police when I have his gold and silver. But a little, but a little, and then all will be right.”

They neither of them felt that they could sleep, and *ma mère* drew out her knitting, but did little, sitting thoughtfully in her chair ; at last, though,

Jean slept heavily till his mother woke him in the early dawn, and together they looked down, trying to pierce the fog which hung in the court, when the first thing that their eyes fell upon was the glazed top of a policeman's hat.

"But you will not go again?" whispered Jean.

"But you are *bête*!" cried the old woman angrily. "Should I leave the treasure I have discover, and let the police have all? No," she cried, hooking her skinny fingers, "I will have all myself, and we will be rich, Jean. Ah! what—you sigh? But you are *bête*, and it is for the little worker who come between us, Jean. You loved your poor mother till she come, and I hate her for it, and I could slay her, for I am mad and disappointed; but I had my revenge for long. I told the preacher something, and he believed me; and you are all fools, you men. But I am not angry, Jean, for you are my own Jean, and you shall be rich yet. What! you push me away? I care not, for you shall be like your father—a gentleman—before he died, and left me in this cold, cold, cold, miserable London. But we will have

the Jarker's treasure, Jean, that I have watched, and we will laugh then at the world."

Jean sat silently gazing down into the court, wincing at times as he heard the bitter words of his mother, while his eyes would then flash as he seemed ready to turn ; but he spoke no word, as he thought over the past night and restrained himself. He knew the value of money, and his face would brighten as he thought of it in connection with Lucy ; but a weary, sad smile came directly after, for he knew such thoughts were folly, and he turned them to Jarker, as he seemed to feel that his duty was to point out the wretch's hiding-place, though he flinched from the task. And still he sat on, hour after hour gazing down into the court, where a strange man, like an artisan out of work, was lounging about smoking a short black pipe, and apparently very intent upon a small birdcage tied up in a blue-spotted handkerchief beneath his arm. There was something of the shoemaker and more of the tailor about him—nothing at all of the detective-policeman, and doubtless it must have been very unpleasant for a man of his income to

smoke such bad tobacco, and pay for so many half-quarterns of rum for Mrs. Sims, who was very communicative concerning the last time Jarker was at home, while a policeman in uniform would have acted as a seal upon her lips. So Mrs. Sims chattered, the strange man watched, and for a time the uniform of the police-force was not seen in Bennett's-rents.

## CHAPTER XV.

### TAKEN.

A HEART at peace, doubtless, had much to do with the rapid strides towards convalescence taken by the Reverend Arthur Sterne, who, in direct opposition to the hints of his medical man and the uplifted hands of Aunt Fanny, resumed his work; and not many days after the visit from Lucy he found himself late one afternoon in the place where so much of his past life had derived its interest. Pale and weak, he climbed slowly up to the garret of *ma mère*; but she was absent with the dogs, though Jean, more sallow than ever, sat cowering over his fire, and thinking of the events of a couple of nights before.

Jean could not restrain the deep frown that came over his forehead as his visitor entered; still

there was an inborn politeness in the way he asked him to be seated, but after replying in a constrained way to the questions put touching his health, he painfully made his way to the window, and appeared to be watching the proceedings in the court below.

But for a while Jean saw nothing, for his gaze was introspective, and the secret he held seemed more than he could bear. Ever pictured in his brain were the scenes his mother had described, and sleeping or waking he saw again and again the wild, agonised face of the murdered woman; while the knowledge that he could point out the murderer's lair, while the officers of the law watched and waited in ignorance, made him angry that he should be bound; for he felt that he was bound, as he thought of his mother's rage and disappointment should Jarker's retreat be discovered before she had ventured again to secure a portion of his spoil; and that night she was to return early, and they were to go. Jean shuddered as he thought of the last visit, and trembled for the one to come; and, could

he have divested himself of certain cares that gnawed his heart, and looked upon Mr. Sterne merely as the friend and pastor, undoubtedly, moved as he then was, he would have told all.

Mr. Sterne had hoped to have found *ma mère* at home, and to have derived from her some information respecting Agnes Hardon. Once he was on the point of questioning Jean respecting her; but he refrained. He was anxious to see her now that he knew her secret, and certain in his own mind of Septimus Hardon, he hoped yet to procure a reconciliation at Somesham; while, at the same time, there was a dim something in his mind that he could not quite shape, as it seemed to point towards Agnes Hardon knowing something of her uncle's arrangements during his last years: but at present he could define nothing, make no plans, though he seemed to be finding the ends of the threads he sought, and felt hopeful yet of a happy termination of much misery. His duty seemed to be to bring all these people into unison if possible; if not, to call in the strong arm of the law, should he feel, after



a long and patient investigation, that there was right upon Septimus Hardon's side.

"Will not your mother soon return, Jean?" said the curate at last.

"No," said the young man moodily; "these busy nights are profitable, and we have little money, while two nights she has spent watching."

"Watching?" said the curate.

Jean started and turned round, making as though he would speak to his visitor; but he turned his back the next moment, when the scene that met his eye chased everything else before it, and, wild and excited, he cried, "Now he is here, and you can take him! I was frightened, and dare not; come you, sir. It was he who beat you down in the street. Here, look!" he hissed between his teeth, standing almost erect as he spoke, and clenching his fists. "If I could strike him down!"

The rage in the young man's face seemed for the moment reflected in that of the curate, as, starting forward, he flung the window open, and recalled the last time he had gazed from where

he stood; but the next instant horror predominated as he looked upon the sight which had so excited the cripple.

There was a heavy mist falling, and the lamps were just alight; but out upon the housetop, and plainly seen in relief, was the figure of Jarker struggling out through the trap-door on to the platform where he kept his pigeons. He was making his way out slowly as Mr. Sterne flung open the window, for it seemed that someone was dragging at him from beneath; and this proved to be the case, for as Jarker struggled out, kicking and striking savagely, the head and shoulders of a policeman appeared, and in the fierce struggle which ensued the man clung so firmly to the ruffian's legs, that he brought him down with a crash, which shivered and crushed the frail cages and traps to atoms; and then ensued a battle for life which chilled with horror those who were looking on, both too helpless to interfere.

The platform was but frail, and cracked and broke away as the two men wrestled together,

while more than one poor bird was crushed to death. Once they rose for a few moments, and rocked to and fro, but Jarker seemed to trip and fall, dragging the policeman with him, and then from the crackling and breaking tiles arose a sound more like the encounter of two wild beasts, as the men writhed and twisted, every instant nearer and nearer to the edge, where there was only a low brick parapet some six inches high; and death for both seemed inevitable.

Jean stood as it were riveted to the spot, his lips apart, eyes distended, and chest heaving: while clutching his shoulder was Mr. Sterne, expecting every moment to see the bodies of the struggling men part the air, and fall with a sickening crash into the court beneath.

But no. Jarker freed one arm, and twined it round one of the platform supports, giving himself a savage wrench, and stopping the slow, gliding motion which had taken him nearer and nearer to the little parapet. Another wrench, and a savage kick, and Jarker was almost at

liberty, when down came the frail platform, to fall bodily into the court.

Shouting at the ruffian, Mr. Sterne now called the attention of the gathering people below to what was going on, for it was time; but before it was possible for aid to be rendered, Jarker had forced the policeman's head back, and dragged his other hand at liberty; then came the sound of a heavy blow as the ruffian raised and dashed his adversary's head against the tiles. Then followed another fierce struggle, the officer fighting for his life, and he held on tenaciously to his opponent; but Jarker was uppermost, and using his great brute strength, he raised and dashed the man's head down again and again, till his hold relaxed, and he rolled over into the gutter, where he lay to all appearance dead; while, with savage cruelty, Jarker loosened a tile so as to have a firm hold, and then with his free hand he seized his enemy and tried to force him over into the court.

But he was arrested by shouts from *ma mère's* room and the open trap, at which now

appeared in the dim light the eager countenance of the artisan-like man who had been hanging about the court; and now, active as a cat, with the man in full pursuit, Jarker went along upon hands and knees, over slate and tile ridge, along gutter, and past stack after stack of chimneys, to where there was a similar platform to his own; but he was disappointed—the trap-door was fast. On he went again, with Nemesis upon his track, over roof after roof again, towards a house with a dormer-window in the sloping slates; but the slates were covered with a redundant moisture, and to his horror he found that he was slowly gliding down to certain death—faster and faster—as he sat as it were upon his iron-nailed boots. A few seconds would have ended his career; but with a frightful oath, such as none but a drink-maddened ruffian would have uttered, he threw himself at full length, and rolled rapidly over and over to a chimney-stack, to which he clung, as he lay upon his face, with his feet so near the awaiting destruction, that his toes rested in the slight iron gutter.

He lay there for a few moments, trembling and unnerved by the danger he had escaped, and then painfully climbing up in the angle formed by the wall of the next house, which stood a little higher, he reached the ridge, and sat astride, panting and showing his teeth at the coming officer, who was making his way more cautiously; while dragging off first one and then the other of his heavy boots, Jarker hurled them at his pursuer before continuing his flight.

The dangerous slope Jarker had crossed gave him an advantage over the officer; for now unable to escape by the trap or window for which he had aimed, the ruffian had doubled, and was working his way rapidly back to his own garret, which now seemed his last resource.

For an instant he stood by the ruins of his pigeon-traps, gazing at the man lying in the gutter—now showing signs of animation—and listening at the opening; but though there were voices enough in the court, all seemed silent in his room, and with one glance at his fast-nearing foe upon the roof, Jarker lowered himself through

his trap; while as Mr. Sterne hurried out of the room, with Jean following him slowly, the ruffian stood once more opposite to the bed of his dead wife, to be confronted by another watching policeman.

Not of the same stuff this man; for a moment's struggle, and Jarker was free, leaping down the stairs, which seemed ready to fall with his weight—nearly to the bottom, with the man in full pursuit; when in the buzz of voices he heard a cry for a light below, which flashed upon the hat of yet another officer.

Panting, mad, hemmed-in on all sides, foes above and foes below, knowing that there was blood upon his hands, and—for aught he knew to the contrary—that the gallows waited for him, the ruffian, as a last resource, dashed open the window upon the first landing, while, as hands actually touched him, he dropped into the backyard.

One man leaned out directly, while another hand was at the window; but they saw Jarker in the dim light below recover himself. Then there was

the banging of a door, and one of the men bounded down the stairs just in time to strike the ruffian back as he made a dash along the passage to force his way through the crowd. But he was not taken yet; though it was with a smile that the policeman wiped his dripping face as he posted himself at the top of the cellar steps, and sent a companion out to watch the grating in the court.

And now it seemed that they had run their game to earth; for after one or two ineffectual attempts to escape during the past forty-eight hours—attempts frustrated by the careful watch kept upon the premises he occupied—Jarker had that evening made his way up through the cellar in a half-maddened state, produced by fear and the wine he had drunk to drive it away, for it was many hours since food had passed his lips. But Mr. Jarker's course was run, and, though ignorant of the offence for which he was sought, there were heinous matters enough upon his conscience to make him fight for liberty to the last gasp; while, upon this last attempt being made,



he had been sighted by the man on watch, who saw him in the passage and drove him back, when, horrified at the idea of going back to the cellar, Jarker had bounded upstairs, to be chased as has been described.

There was no lack of policemen now upon the spot, and while the crowd was kept back, place was given to Mr. Sterne, who, with Jean hanging upon his arm, slowly descended the cellar-steps, preceded by the policemen, with staves in hand and open lanterns.

“Keep a good look-out on the stairs,” said the artisan-looking man—the quiet man of a day or two before, and one in authority. And now, inch by inch, the cellar was searched; then bin after bin of the inner vault; when the men turned and looked at their leader.

“O, he’s here, somewhere,” said the sergeant, and taking a lantern in hand, he peered long and carefully into every bin, while, trembling with eagerness, Jean pressed forward to see if the discovery would be made. He was not kept long in suspense; for, after directing his light care-

fully along the sawdust, the keen-eyed man suddenly exclaimed, "There's someone been through here. Here's fresh candle-grease and matches; and what's this?"

Jean pressed forward with the others, and "this" proved to be a fragment of a stuff dress caught in an old nail between the bricks, a scrap which Jean recognised as a piece of his mother's dress.

Jarker's hiding-place, or rather this entrance to his hiding-place, owed much of its strength to its very openness; for, with the house and cellar-doors as it were free to the neighbourhood, many of the other tenants of the court even coming at times for water, no one would suspect the existence of a secret lair, though a careful examination of the long deep bin, now that attention was so fully directed to it, soon robbed the spot of its mystery.

"Crowbar," said the sergeant abruptly, and a man departed in search of the implement; while one whispered to another his opinion that, if there was another way out, they were done, after all.

But now a new-comer forced her way upon the scene, after quite a battle with the constable on duty at the head of the stairs; and but for the request of Mr. Sterne, she would not have obtained her desire. And now bitterly in French *ma mère* reproached her son for betraying her secret, though he as eagerly denied it, appealing to the curate, who freely exonerated the young man from having made any communications to the police.

“But what is the secret, *ma mère*?” he said to her in her own tongue.

“Come away, come away,” she whispered, wringing her hands; but Jean would not move, and the old woman was compelled to be a spectator of what followed.

A few blows from the crowbar, when it was brought, shivered the thin end stone to pieces, and Jean shuddered as he felt the cold damp air rush through the black opening, as the sergeant exclaimed,

“That’s sewers, my lads: there’s another way out. Now, who’ll go first?”

No one moved ; but *ma mère* groaned.

“ Who wants promotion ? ” said the sergeant again.

The muttering that followed seemed to intimate that all three of the men present wanted it, but not at the cost of thrusting his body into the black hole before him.

“ Then I hope you’ll make matters straight if I’m hurt, my lads,” said the sergeant grimly.

“ That we will, sir,” chorussed the men, and then there was quite a competition for the second post of honour ; as, without another moment’s hesitation the sergeant crept into the bin, thrust his lantern forward as far as he could, looked eagerly round, and then, staff in hand, he regularly shot himself forward, and called to his men to follow. But there was no enemy to encounter : nothing to be seen but bins round the cellar, a box or two, the open hole, and the furnace.

“ Who’d have thought of there being this place here ? ” said the sergeant to Mr. Sterne, when *ma mère* and her son both stood shuddering in the cellar with them ; the Frenchwoman creeping

towards the boxes, her fingers working the while. "Old houses, you see, sir; gentlemen's houses once; and this was an old cellar; wine in it, too, seemingly, and forgotten. Melting-pot, of course," he continued, pointing to the crucible. "Nice handy spot for it; and of course he has made himself all right before now. Gone down to one of the sewers, I suppose," he said. "And while we were hunting him t'other day, he had crawled up here, and was taking his port. Boxes, eh? what's in the boxes?" One of the men was already examining the treasure-chests, and the agony in the old Frenchwoman's face was pitiful, as she saw the lids opened of first one and then the other, to find in place of the riches she had pictured, broken glass, worn out crucibles, and brickbats that had formed part of the furnace.

"Rubbish!" said one of the men, when the old woman reeled, and would have fallen if the curate had not caught her in his arms and seated her upon one of the boxes.

"Nice place to go down, sir; take that old lady out in the fresh air," said the sergeant,

peering at the black opening, and listening to the quick rush of water. "There," he said to one of his men, "you needn't stew. I ain't going to send you where I wouldn't go myself."

The man spoken to held up his hand to command silence, for at that moment there came a strange rustling noise, mingled with the fierce rush of the water, while before they could recover from their surprise, drenched with the foul stream, his distorted face looking absolutely fiendish and inhuman, the head of Jarker appeared for a moment at the hole.

"Help!" he gasped, with a cry that rung through the place, but before hand could touch him he had fallen back with a heavy splash: there was the sound of water rushing furiously along with a hollow, echoing, gurgling noise; and the men stood looking at one another.

"Here, for God's sake, men," cried Mr. Sterne, "do something!" and, weak, and trembling with horror, he stepped towards the hole; but the sergeant had his arms round him in a moment.

“Keep still, sir,” he said sternly; “we’ve done our part, I think. It’s certain death to go down there; they’re flushing the sewers, I should say, or else there’s a heavy fall of rain somewhere. He’s halfway to the Thames by now.”

The next moment Mr. Sterne was telling himself that he had left his room too soon, for a strange sick feeling came over him, and the place around looked misty and indistinct; but his was not the only sleepless couch that night, for the old Frenchwoman moaned bitterly at the destruction of the *Chateau en Espagne* which she had raised.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WORN OUT.

A HEAVY step upon the stairs, a heavy knock upon the door, and a heavy-eyed, heavy-countenanced man asking for Septimus Hardon.

“And he wants you, too, Miss,” said the man. “O dear, O dear! he was the only friend I ever had, and he came back the night afore last, after you’d been to ask for him. Not seen him, we hadn’t, for long enough; and then to come back like this!” and the great fellow sat down unasked upon a chair, and sobbed like a child.

“He wants to see you, sir,” he said again, “and we’ve done all we could,” he cried pitifully; “but you see he’s old, sir, and there ain’t nothing of him as’ll hold together, and he knows it, sir; and he only laughed and said, he says, ‘Ikey, old man,’



he says, 'it must be all new stuff,' he says, 'for the stitches won't hold no longer;' and he was the only friend I ever had. 'Go and tell them,' he says, 'as old Matt's taken his last copy, and would like to see 'em afore he takes the wages he's earned.' You'll come and see him, won't you, sir? though it's no sort of a place to come to; and the missus is breaking her heart about him."

Half-an-hour after, Septimus Hardon and Lucy were in Lower Serles-place, where, in the dingy back-room, close to the waste-paper, lay poor old Matt, with Mrs. Gross upon her knees beside his bed, crying bitterly, as the poor old man lay calm and apparently sleeping; but he started when Lucy knelt down and took his hand, to let a tear fall upon it.

"God bless you!" he whispered earnestly, as his dim eyes recognised the face bending over him. "Come like an angel to a dying man. God bless you, sir, I'm glad you've come; I was in mortal fear that you would be too late. Tell her—but no, I will.—Mother Slagg, you and Ikey go for a bit, please."

The weeping woman put her apron to her eyes, and went out with her husband. It was a heavy afternoon, and the fog was settling down fast over the City. The light struggled feebly through the window, half-covered as it was with boots ; but the great landlord returned directly with a thick, strong-smelling candle, stuck upon a block of wood between three nails.

As soon as the door was once more closed—a rare position for it, and one which it resented for some time, until Ikey had poked the corners clean with an awl, and oiled the lock—old Matt said huskily :

“Put your hand, sir, under my pillow. That’s it, that there little Bible. Know it, sir?” he said, for Septimus Hardon had changed colour, and his hands were trembling. “That took me a long time to get, sir,” and then he slowly and painfully told what he said he would have spared Miss Lucy if he could, but it was not to be ; how he had seen Agnes Hardon lying dead, she whom he knew now to have been Agnes Hardon ; how he had attended the inquest, and then tried to get a Bible

that had been there mentioned, seeking for it day after day, night after night, ready to drop always, but feeling that he should succeed in spite of all. He searched the streets, he said, but all in vain; and at last he began to fear that the poor girl to whom Agnes gave the Bible had emulated her fate, when he recalled the address of the jurymen, found to his delight she had been there, and through the stranger's influence obtained the prize he sought.

“And now,” said Matt, “I’m happy. I can feel, sir, that I’ve done one little bit of good in my life, and I can go easy. Now, sir that book.”

Septimus, wondering and surprised, turned from Matt to Lucy, sobbing and horror-stricken at the old man’s recital, for much of what he heard now had yet to be explained to him; but the old man was intent upon the little Bible, one that Septimus remembered to have seen at home in his father’s desk.

“Now!” exclaimed the old man, with hands trembling, and eyes appealing, lest his hearers should lose anything of what he disclosed; “now

look, look, look!" he cried, "I fastened it down again, as it was before. A knife, quick! Now look here," he said huskily, and he tried to insert the blade of the penknife given to him beneath the fly-leaf, groaning bitterly at his inability, when, with hands trembling nearly as much, Septimus took Bible and knife, loosened the paper round, and laid it open, when the first thing that met his eyes, in his father's clear handwriting, was the date of the marriage, and eighteen months after appeared the entry of his birth, while upon the opposite side, in a delicate woman's hand, were the words—

“AGNES HARDON.

*The gift of Uncle Octavius.”*

“There, there, there, sir! That's it, isn't it, sir?” cried the old man excitedly. “I wouldn't rest till I'd got it, and 'twas hard work, for the poor girl clung to it as the gift of someone she loved; but the more she hung back, the more I was set upon having it. I knew enough of binding to see that the end-leaf was gummed down, and under that leaf I knew there was what I wanted.

Here ; breath !" he gasped ; " open the window."

Septimus Hardon sat gazing dreamily at the entry in his hand ; it was indisputable, though he could hardly believe in its truth, while the few words he heard coming from the weeping girl seemed only to add to the confused state of his mind ; but it appeared to him now that the old man's condition was the first thing to consider, and placing the book in his pocket, he begged that he might try and have him removed to his own lodgings.

" No," said Matt feebly, " no ; I won't leave here, for somehow these people love me after their way, and I seem to think that the end should be much what the life has been ; and as to doctor, sir, why I've got one here," he said, gazing fondly up in Lucy's weeping face, " and if she'll stop here, and let me hold her hand, God bless her ! I can go easy, for it will seem to keep ill away. No other doctor's any use, sir. I'm worn out, sir, worn out !"

But Septimus would not be satisfied, and

leaving Lucy by the old man's side, he fetched assistance to his old friend.

"No hope at all?" he said, as the doctor and he walked together afterwards through the dingy shop.

"Not the slightest," said the surgeon once more, as he stood upon the doorstep. "He has never thoroughly recovered from the effects of the operations he suffered, and besides, it's the old tale with the poor fellow—sorrow, misery, starvation, on the one hand; dissipation, drink, late hours on the other. The poor old fellow speaks the truth; he is worn out."

Night came, and Lucy and Septimus still waited by the old man's dying bed. He had slept for some little time, during which interval Lucy had replied to her step-father's many queries—replied as she thought of the despair that must have prompted the awful plunge into futurity. Then the old man woke, and talked eagerly for awhile of the future prospects of the family. But soon a change came over his face, his head tossed wearily from side to side of his dirty pillow, while often he would raise it and stare

wildly from face to face, but recognising none, sink back again with a pitiful moan.

“Lost life, lost life! Worn out, worn out!” he kept on muttering as he tossed restlessly from side to side, frequently starting and looking round as if not knowing where he was. Then he seemed to sleep peacefully for awhile, to open his eyes once more, and smile feebly at his visitors, beckoning them to come nearer.

“God bless you both!” he muttered; “it’s all over.”

Septimus half-rose and would have fetched the doctor again, but Matt whispered “No.”

“Don’t go,” he said. “He can do no good now, nor anyone else; I’m past all that. It’s been coming for days past, and I’ve fought it out; kept on till my work was done. I’ve never been much good, sir; but now I’m worn out. P'r'aps I might have been different, if I'd had other chances; but I was always weak, sir; weak.”

He paused again; and Lucy’s sobs were the only sounds that broke the silence.

“ Ah !” said Matt again, feebly ; “ I’ve justified many a line, sir ; line by line—‘ line upon line,’ don’t it say somewhere ? but I can’t justify myself. Dropping out of the old forme, sir ; fast—fast now. But there, sir, hold up ; for I’m happy enough. You did me a good turn once, and I’ve tried to pay it back ; and since I’ve known you, and you’ve been ready to be my friends, I’ve seemed to get proud, and wouldn’t do anything that should disgrace Miss Lucy here. But I began too late, and I never deserved such friends as I’ve found ; for I’ve been a poor, weak, helpless drinking old galley-slave. But there, sir,” he said with a smile, “ my case is foul ; the sorts are out ; and I’m putting away my stick for good.”

“ May I fetch Mr. Sterne ?” whispered Septimus.

“ No, no, no,” said the old man wearily ; “ we were never friends ; and I can’t play the hypocrite, sir. It’s too late, sir ; too late ! What I’ve done, I’ve done. Let me die in peace, here, with your loving faces by me ; and fetch poor old Ike in, by and by, for he loves me in



his way. No, sir; it would be the act of a hypocrite, I fancy, for me to send for a clergyman now. No, Mr. Hardon, sir; stay with me to the last; and let me hold tightly by this little white hand, and I can go from you hopeful and in peace. For if the great God who sent me here, struggling on through a life of care, has made hearts so gentle, and true, and loving, that they can weep and sorrow over my poor old battered case, can't I hope that He who knows all, and has seen all my helpless weakness, will be merciful? I know, sir, I know. I might have done better: but it's been a life of drive and struggle—money to-day, starve to-morrow, and drink always, to hold up and do the work. I'm sorry, sir, sorry; but the sorrow came too late. I've had a hard life, sir; the wish for better things came too late, when I was worn, and shattered, and used up; when the day was too far spent, sir; and now the night's coming on faster and faster. Hold my hands tight," he whispered, "for it's growing dark and darker; and I'm losing my way."

And now once more there was a long silence, when the old man looked eagerly round.

“What time is it?” he asked; and Septimus told him, then, turning towards Lucy, the old man whispered—

“Put your hand to my lips, that I may kiss it once before I go;” but she leaned over and tenderly kissed him, when he smiled, and some words passed, but they were too faint to be heard. Then he was restless for a while; but soon started again, to stare wildly round. “What’s that?” he asked.

“Nothing but the wind moaning round the houses,” whispered Lucy.

“No,” he said with a smile, “nothing but the wind—nothing but the wind waiting to scatter the dust.”

And now he lay so still and peaceful, that, in answer to Lucy’s inquiring look, Septimus bent over him again and again; but as he looked in that sorrow-ploughed face he could see that the old man still slept, while, with the light strong upon her face as she knelt, Lucy seemed no mean

representative of the angel watching by the old man's side.

“An angel, sir, an angel, sir!” he had muttered again; and then he seemed to doze off, muttering the words to himself.

“Worn out!” said Septimus Hardon, as he listened time after time to the faintly-borne chimes of St. Clement's; and then he thought of the present revelation, which seemed almost dearly bought in the old man's death; of the past; the office in Carey-street, and its sorrows; the bitter struggle for mere life; the lodging in Bennett's-rents; and the shabby old compositor in his frayed suit, pinching himself that he might supply their wants; the watchful care and jealousy with which he had tended Lucy to and from the warehouse; the secret they had shared, and the old man's chivalrous endurance in tracing out the information; spite of all blurs or blots upon his character, ever the same tender, true-hearted man, devoted to his friends' interests, and ready with his offering, even though it were humble as the cup of cold water that should not be without its

reward ; and now worn out—the poor old setting battered and worthless, but the heart true and bright to the last.

The quarters chimed again. Isaac had been to set up a fresh candle, and then retired to his weeping partner ; while, now seated upon an old work-bench, Septimus Hardon still let his thoughts wander, pausing long upon the poverty of the crowded streets of the great City ; the prosperity crushing down the misery ; the swiftly-hurrying stream of life, and the striving of the throng to keep afloat, as others pressed upon them, climbed upon their shoulders, or, in the madness of despair, clung to their legs and dragged them down to the muddy ooze at the bottom. He thought too once more of his own misery, and that of this waif, after its long encounter with the storms of life, cast up torn, weary, and breathless upon the shore.

Mournfully moaned the wind down the court and at the back of the house, making cowls creak and spin, and rattling worn old windows ; for it was no bright starry night, the clouds gathered

black overhead, and sent down a pitiless rain to empty the streets, and be caught by the wind and dashed against the panes. By the feeble light in the front shop, Isaac could be seen with his head against the wall sleeping heavily; and, worn out with watching, his wife had returned to the next house. Now faintly heard in the lulls of the wind came the striking of St. Clement's clock and its laboured chiming, which sounded wild and strange upon the night air.

Suddenly Lucy and her stepfather started, for the old man was sitting up in bed with one hand raised as if to command silence, and loud, clear, and strange, his voice seemed to thrill through the silence as the tones of the bells came louder upon the wind.

“Hush!” cried the old man, “the bells! I set it once, and I’ve never forgotten it—‘Ring out the false, ring in the true’—never forgotten it,” he muttered, as he sank heavily back and spoke in a whisper—“‘Ring out the false, ring in the true.’ Hands—hands—once again; they’re ringing out a false and coward heart, and ringing

in the true." Then he began to mutter from time to time words connected with his trade—wild incoherent words, but strangely fitted to his past life and present state; while at times he spoke with such wild bitterness that his hearers shuddered, and Isaac came trembling in, leading with him Mr. Sterne, anxious at their protracted absence.

And so an hour passed, when the dying man had been for some time silent, but another kneeling figure had offered a prayer at the bedside; then once more the old man began to mutter, at first in a low tone, then slowly and aloud.

"Cold, sir, cold; bitter cold for an old man like me—dreary streets, sir, and the lamps out—dark, dark—the dull courts and the foggy alleys—misery—beggary—starvation. Bright fields—light and darkness. No hypocrite, sir—humbly, with an angel's kiss upon my old lips—a seal—purity. Hark! Copy and proof—copy and proof—blurred and blotted—foul—foul—spelling—outs and doubles—corrections—too late—too late. Wages on Friday night, sir; wages, sir—wages of

sin—wages—death—death—poor girl!—sleeping  
—found drowned—the Bible—Agnes Hardon—  
wages—wages—darker and darker—but no hypo-  
cite, sir—with an angel's kiss—an angel's—for-  
give—forgive—for ever and ever—and ev—”

Silence in the room, and the watchers stealing  
away.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ MY SOLICITORS, SIR ! ”

It never rains but it pours, and the storm fell heavily now upon the head of Doctor Hardon of Somesham. Through the instrumentality of Mr. Sterne he was served with the requisite legal notices, which seemed to be of the nature of seeds calling up a variety of legal plants, which coiled, and twined, and curled round the doctor, threatening to strangle him with their powerful tendrils ; for he was deeply involved in numerous speculative matters, and the fact of his being legally summoned to give up his brother's estate, now reduced to quite one-half—for he had disposed of all that he could—roused the aggressiveness of the law—a law which seemed omniscient as regarded failing men's affairs ; and a few days after, from information he had received, as the



policemen say, Septimus Hardon learned that his uncle was in Cursitor-street.

“ I would go and see him,” said Mr. Sterne ; “ he may feel disposed to give up all quietly ; and I presume that you would take no steps to enforce restitution of what he has sold during his occupation of your rights ? ”

“ No, no ; no, no ! ” exclaimed Septimus ; “ he is a ruined man . ”

Septimus Hardon shuddered as he turned into Cursitor-street—dirty, cheerless, sponging-housey Cursitor-street of those days, with its legal twang and the iron-barred windows of the sheriffs’ houses. There was no difficulty in finding the residence of Mr. Barjonas, for the brass-plate was on the door, though from its colour it was only by supposition that the plate was termed brass. The windows were coated with a preservative paste of dirt, while the same composition entered strongly into all the domestic arrangements. In front, the pavement was marked all over with cabalistic signs, over which hopped and danced dirty children—young clients, perhaps—in company with pieces of

broken plate, there called “chaney;” the road was decorated with parsnip-cuttings and potatoe-peelings, after the mode adopted in Bennett’s-rents; while sundry indications pointed to the fact that coffee was much in favour, for the grounds found a resting-place in the gutter. A bashaw-like cock was scratching over some scraps of parchment and sawdust-sweepings, but they seemed dry, so he refrained from calling up the ladies of his harem—two—both of whom were of the breed known as “five-toed Dorkings,” and in duty bound to be white, but they were of a peculiar tint, like mouldy robes.

Septimus Hardon walked up to a thick-lipped gentleman upon the doorstep, and, as he seemed disposed to bar the way, told him of his business.

“Show this gedt idto dudber seved,” said the officer; for such he was, though only holding commission from the sheriff.

A fluey-headed boy, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders to display two very thin arms, at the end of one of which he carried

a black waiter, came forward, performing a sort of shaving operation with the edge of the said waiter on his smooth chin, and beckoning to the visitor, ushered him into the room known as number seven, where Septimus stood in presence of his uncle, and gazed with wonder at the change. For the doctor's clothes were growing looser upon him hour by hour, and his cheeks hung flabby and in folds above his dirty white neckcloth.

But more than at this Septimus Hardon gazed at his uncle's strange lost aspect, as he stood with his gold pencil-case in one hand and a letter in the other—a letter which he had read over again and again, and then paused to wipe his forehead with his hand. But it was only a letter of upbraiding from his wife, enclosing to him a small scrap which the wretched woman had clipped from a newspaper—a paper weeks old, but which Fate had ordered should be sent to her ; while now she asked her ruined lord who was the woman taken from the river, the woman who had nursed Eleanor Anderson, and had asked their help and forgiveness at that very time. Upbraidings, words

almost of rage, she had sent him in that letter, telling him of his obstinacy, and reminding him of the times she had implored his forgiveness. And now these words had come at an hour when he could bear no more. He had read letter and paragraph in a dreamy, misty way, thinking of his losses—of his wrongs to his nephew, while now the man himself stood before him, perhaps to add his revilings. Worn out with anxiety and sleeplessness, faint with hunger and weary calculations of his affairs, the doctor strove for an instant to regain command of himself; then stared piteously at his visitor for an instant, staggered, grasped at his neckcloth, and fell heavily upon the floor.

Time passed; and as soon as the proper legal arrangements were completed, Septimus Hardon was to be possessed of his father's much reduced property—an estate shorn of its extent, but still what, to a poor man, seemed wealth. In obedience to his wishes, the affairs had been arranged in the quietest manner, Septimus Hardon's not being a nature to trample upon a fallen man—

fallen indeed; for his next visit to his uncle was at one of the debtors' prisons, from which there seemed no likelihood of his release, so deeply was he involved.

Mrs. Doctor Hardon had been to Essex-street the night before begging that he would come, for the poor woman was in despair and dread at the turn matters were taking; for there the doctor sat as he had sat the night through in his shabbily-furnished room, sitting with a heavy frown upon his forehead, wrinkled as though the spirit of evil pressed down upon him heavily. Three times over he had sternly bade the weeping woman begone—the wife of many years—who, her fit of bitter anger passed, now hung about the gates of a morning until they were opened, and would then have laid her gray head upon his shoulder as she whispered comfort. But no; her lot was to pace wearily up and down; and the doctor sat alone, hour after hour, brooding over his fall; the proofs brought forward that his was a fraud; the curse that had seemed to attend the money; the failure of venture after venture that

he had looked upon as certainties ; the gnawing agony of his heart for the daughter he had lost, but who was to have been forgiven at some future time—always at some time in the future—a season put off till it was too late, and she had gone for forgiveness elsewhere ; while, above all, there was a strange wild impending dread overtopping every cloud and driving him to turn over and over in his pocket a small-stoppered bottle—a bottle without a label, and held so long in his hand that the glass was hot.

A noble mansion had the doctor built in imagination : one that should be wondrous in its prosperity and endurance, but it had no foundation — a bit had crumbled here, a wall there cracked, then a corner had given way (a key to the whole), and with a crash the fabric had come down—so that the builder’s spirit was crushed as here he sat, shrunk and limp, waiting for the news of some fresh calamity, some new fall that should crush him yet more ; for in his wild dreams he had seen his brother threatening him, and Septimus triumphantly shaking the will in

his face. And so he sat on, hour after hour, clasping the tiny bottle in his hand—containing what? But a spoonful of some limpid fluid; while the stricken man still listened as if for something that he expected to happen that day.

There he sat, without fire, but feeling not the cold, hearing not the imploring whispered words of his wife—words uttered at the door after he had dismissed her, to wander up and down or sit shivering, and refusing the offered hospitality of some feeling fellow-prisoner.

Deeper grew the wrinkles upon the doctor's brow as he sat. He had taken nothing for many hours, but a wine-glass stood upon the table, and more than once a trembling hand had been stretched out to grasp it. But he would wait another hour, he would wait until that other crushing news came, that other news hidden from his sight as by 'a black curtain, which ever trembled as though about to be raised. He would wait until the clocks struck again, just to think; though each stroke of hammer upon bell sounded

funereally upon his ear. Again another hour, and another, and so on through the long night, through the gray, cold dawn, and again after the bright rising of the sun, which brought no hope to him.

“Only one other hour,” said the crouching man, and the words hissed between his fevered lips. “Only another hour!” he muttered, while his bloodshot eyes seemed to dilate as he drew forth the bottle and held it up to the light, shook it, and watched the bright beads that trickled down the sides of the glass. His unshorn beard and sunken cheeks gave him a strangely haggard look; such that those who had known him in former days would have passed him without recognition.

Suddenly there was a step in the long corridor—one of many, but a step that he seemed to know; and then followed low voices, and the sound of a woman sobbing.

It had come at last—he had waited, and it was here—and a bitter smile trembled, it did not play, round the lips of Doctor Hardon, as he once more drew forth the bottle.



“This, this, this!” he kept on hissing in a harsh whisper as he smiled, thinking that the dark curtain which trembled in front would show him the future and not the present. And now he tried to draw forth the little stopper, but it was immovable. He tore at it fiercely, and then seized it with his teeth, but it broke short off, and he spat the piece angrily upon the floor.

“Now, now!” he muttered, as though there was not a moment to spare, while with trembling hand he seized the poker, and, holding the bottle above the wine-glass, struck it sharply, shivered it to atoms, and the liquid, mingled with sharp fragments, fell into the vessel, a large portion splashing over the table and moistening the doctor’s hand.

“Now, now!” he muttered, seizing the glass; and as he gave one glance at the bright blue wintry sky, he raised the little vessel hesitatingly to his lips. Then the door was pushed open, Mrs. Hardon stepped in, shrieked, and dashed the undrained glass from her husband’s hand, so that it fell shivered upon the cold heartstone,

when, falling at his feet and clutching his knees, the unhappy woman sobbed loudly,

“O Tom, Tom, ask him to forgive us !” but the doctor only stood glaring at his visitor.

“Indeed, indeed, Septimus, I never knew it,” sobbed Mrs. Hardon.

“It is of the past—let it rest,” said her nephew, who could not remove his eyes from his uncle, now smiling feebly and pointing to the chamber-door.

“Why would you provoke this painful scene?” he said in an injured tone. “You must have known, sir, that the interview would be most unfortunate. Pray go. My solicitors, Messrs. Keen- ing. Every arrangement has been made, and the funeral will take place to-morrow.”

Mrs. Hardon started up, and stood clasping one of her husband’s hands as she looked aghast in his face, while he continued in the same feeble voice :

“No will, sir—illegitimate—pray leave—most painful,” and with his disengaged hand he still

pointed towards the door. “My solicitors, sir, Messrs. Keening.”

“Pray—pray go,” whispered Mrs. Hardon. “He is worn out, and ill with anxiety. I’ll—I’ll write, Septimus,” and she hurried her visitor to the door. “But don’t—don’t punish us for what is past,” she said imploringly.

The look of Septimus Hardon was sufficient as he turned to the unhappy woman ; and then he stepped into the passage with the intention of fetching medical assistance, for, as the door closed, he once more heard the doctor’s voice :

“My solicitors, sir, Messrs. Keening. Pray go.”

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE LARK UNCAGED.

THAT was only a poor wedding that Jean Marais, with a bright spot in each of his sallow cheeks and a wild look in his dark eyes, gazed down upon from the gloomy old gallery of the church ; only a quiet wedding that those two eager eyes had gazed upon, when their crippled owner had climbed slowly and laboriously up to the gallery to watch unseen, while the ceremony was performed which gave Lucy Grey to her happy husband ; but beneath those wild eyes there were convulsed features, cracked and quivering lips.

And the lark ? He bore his treasure with him, the bird she had loved to hear ; it nestled in his breast, and a stall-keeper hard by took charge of the cage. And there watched Jean unseen, while

Lucy, turning her eyes upon her husband, accompanied him into the vestry.

Then below in the nave there was the buzz of expectation as the party came from the vestry—Lucy, blushing and fair, leaning upon the curate's arm; and he, proud of the treasure he had won, walking happy and elate by her side. But it was only a poor wedding—poor in the show that was made and in those who assembled; for Bennett's rents was empty that morning, and Mrs. Sims' sniff was heard again and again, just inside the chancel; while the only wonder was that some of the children gathered together were not crushed beneath the wheels of the conveyances.

It was only a poor affair, but there was a light in many a face there that would have outshone the glories of a fashionable wedding. Even Mrs. Septimus forgot her troubles, and confided more than once to Aunt Fanny that she thought her complaint had got the turn.

But there knelt Jean the cripple, alone in the gallery, till the last looker-on had left, the last wheel rolled from the gate, and a sad stillness had

fallen upon the empty church, when, with a bitter, heartwrung cry, the young man crouched lower and lower, burying his face in his hands. Then he slowly rose, and taking his crutch, painfully made his way towards the narrow door, his looks worn and weary, but with a strange light in his eye.

Pausing at length in the busy street, he took from his breast the bird he had so long tended, and started slightly, but with a bitter smile upon his lips, for in his emotion he had crushed the poor thing, and it panted feebly, with half-closed eye and open beak; but Jean only smiled. And with the same sad look he replaced the bird in his bosom, and then slowly and laboriously crept along, side by side, with the hurrying stream of passengers. Toiling on slowly and patiently, his crutch sounding loudly upon the pavement, with the same bitter look fixed as it were upon his lip, Jean Marais slowly toiled on till he was lost in the crowd.

Only a poor wedding; but Aunt Fanny was

there, laughing and crying by turns, and vowing that she heard every word of the service, and that Arthur never spoke out so well before. And what a dress the old lady wore! surely no poplin ever before displayed such plaits; and then, forgetful of dress, plaits, muslin, everything, was it not a treat to see her take Lucy to her warm old heart when they had returned to Essex-street, as the fair girl knelt at her feet, the large eyes gazing up so appealingly, and seeming to say—"Don't despise me for being so humble!" But, there; had she been a princess, she could have had no warmer nook in the old dame's heart, for was not Arthur happy? And then those arms, that of old lay so placidly across her black-silk apron—worn even at the return from the wedding, and brought in a reticule—became restless to a degree, ever animated by the desire to embrace her children.

Did she love Lucy? Had not Arthur, the wisest of men, chosen her? and did not that spread such a mantle of holiness around the maiden that, even had Aunt Fanny never seen her, she would have battled for her to the death?

Would he have chosen any but the purest and noblest of heart? she asked herself again and again. So she divided her love between them, and then, upon the return from church, laughed and cried by turns; for, said she, "I must leave poor Arty now."

Arthur Sterne was silent, but he smiled as he saw two soft round arms circle Aunt Fanny's neck, prisoning her as their owner whispered words whose import he could guess.

A quiet repast, and a short interval of preparation before the start for a trip, only some miles from town, an easy drive, for a few days' visit to where the sweet breath of the country blew; and then the elders standing at the door watching the departing vehicle, and the waving hands, as the wheels rattled along the echoing street; and then upstairs, for Aunt Fanny and Mrs. Septimus to talk of their children, while Septimus Hardon roamed the streets.

"O, the bright lovely country!" cried Lucy, as the carriage rolled on between hedgerows here and there silvered with the scented May, whose



fragrance was borne by the light breeze through the open windows. "O, the bright lovely country!" she cried; "am I not foolish, Arthur?" she sobbed; "but the tears will come, for I feel that this happiness cannot last!"

The word "Arthur" was spoken hesitatingly, as if it were strange to her lips, and she hardly dared to use it; her eyes were fixed for a moment upon those of her husband, and then she glided down to the bottom of the fly and kneeled at his feet, as he fondly parted the hair upon her broad forehead.

"You are not angry with me for being so childish?" she murmured.

"Angry!" he replied, and the tone in which he said that word was sufficient.

"Don't think me foolish," she said; "but let us walk a little here, where the grass borders the road; for it seems wrong to hurry past the lovely green trees, after the close misery of London. They are new to me, Arthur; and look! look! there are flowers, and birds; and see how the bright sunshine dances amongst the leaves. But,

there," she said sadly; "you smile at my folly, and forget what all this is to me, after years of prisoning London."

But the next minute the fly had stopped, and, relieved of its load, resumed its way; and, happy and proud, Arthur Sterne looked down upon his newly-wedded wife, elate to see the pure, intense love of all that was beautiful in nature which emanated from this escaped prisoner of life; while Lucy was divided between delight of the scene around her, and reproach for her so-called indifference towards her husband. And so they walked, inhaling the sweets of the early summer afternoon, and finding in them joys known only to those who have escaped but freshly from the great City's miseries. And still on and on, almost in silence, enveloped as they were in the happiness of the present.

"Listen!" cried Lucy, as she stopped suddenly, and laid a finger upon her husband's lip—a finger now white and delicate, once fretted and workworn. "Listen!" she whispered, "and close your eyes. Might not that be poor Jean's lark?"

and then both stood listening, as in those days of the past, when their prisoned souls had gazed up eagerly into the bright blue sky, and they had drunk in the pure gushing lay of the speckled songster.

“Tears, more tears, Lucy?” whispered the curate. “Are you not happy?”

No words came for a reply, nothing but a look; as the bright eyes brimmed over, and a sob rose from the burdened heart.

“It seems too much—as if it could not last,” whispered Lucy; “and that song brought back so many sorrows, dear—the court, and so much of the past. But you will forgive me, Arthur?”

Again the same hesitating speech, as if it were an assumption upon her part to call him by his name, and she half dreaded rebuke.

“What does the driver want?” said Mr. Sterne; for the man was shouting and making signs.

By the time they had overtaken the vehicle, the man had dismounted and was by the bank, stooping over a reclining figure; and on approach-

ing nearer, the curate recognised the cripple, Jean, lying apparently asleep, holding his lark to his lips, while his crutch was by his side. But if the master slept, it was not so with the bird; for its soft feathers were ruffled, its wings half-open, and the lids drawn partly over the little dark, bead-like eyes; the crest lay smooth, the throat-feathers rose not, the wings had fluttered for the last time; the bright, gushing lay would thrill through prisoned hearts in Bennett's-rents no more—the lark was dead.

And its master? To get one more look, one farewell glance, he had toiled wearily on, mile after mile, towards the village where he had heard they would rest; and on he pressed, with a strength evoked by the despair of his heart, till he had sat down to rest by the wayside and sunk back exhausted.

In an instant Lucy was upon her knees by his side and had raised his head, while her husband's hand was in the cripple's breast. Then he slowly opened his eyes and stared wildly round till they rested upon her who supported his head,

when his features softened, and a smile came once more upon his lips as they seemed to part to form the words “ Good-bye !”

And then slowly and imperceptibly the smile faded from his lip, the light from his eye ; and as they gazed upon him, a cold sternness stole over the poor youth’s countenance, till, with agony depicted in her every feature, Lucy looked up appealingly at her husband.

But Jean was dead—passed away ; for he had toiled through the streets, nerved by a stern determination—a wild despair—on through the suburbs, and so out into the country ; the one purpose always in his mind—to be where she would come once more ; on still, slowly, painfully, hour after hour, till he sank exhausted, to die of a ruptured blood-vessel.

And still, of a summer’s evening, may the loungeur in the great streets of the West come upon a knot of idlers ; and, pausing for a few moments, listen to divers sharply-uttered commands given in French to a pair of wretched

poodles ; who fetch and carry, rise erect, and march about with aspect doleful and disconsolate, till a few of the bystanders drop halfpence in the basket one of the dogs carries in his mouth. Then a fresh pitch is made ; the performance again gone through ; and then on again ; on after *ma mère* of the sharp and eager look—the harsh, cracked voice ; on again, with drooping ears and tail—unlion-like of aspect ; on again, perhaps to cast a look of envy at some free and rollicking idle dog, or of condolence at the miserable sharp-eyed monkey performing on the table, rapid in every moment, but more rapid in the glance of its little dark, blow-watching eye. And at last, when the streets grow thin of passengers, and the dogs tired and blundering, home to the court where they dwell — a court yet standing, though Bennett's-rents is no more ; another court, where the flags lie broken, and the refuse-choked channel festers with the water from the hard-used pump ; where the children revel by day in the dirt and filth, and Death oft and oft again beckons the undertaker to come with his sham-

bling horse and shabby Shillibeer-hearse ; where the pigeons cluster upon the housetops and coo at daybreak, and then circle in flights, while men of the Jarker stamp urge them on. Home, to another old house, and up the groaning stairs, where even by night the twittering of birds can be heard in lodgers' rooms—prisoners dwelling in a prison within a prison ; here, too, the click of a sewing-machine—patent—man's make ; there, the sigh of a sewing-machine—not patent—God's make ; and up the rickety stairs to another attic, where cages hang — empty cages, kept because they were those of Jean ; where the crutch stands in the corner beneath the lark's home, brought back by the neighbour who keeps a stall, but empty too : canaries, linnets, finches, passed away ; while the lark lies upon the breast of its master—the cripple Jean—and the turf grows green above his resting-place at Highgate.

“*En avant—venez donc—mes chiens !* Home!”  
though it be not Bennett's-rents.

## CHAPTER XIX.

MAD.

IN one of those vast piles of building a short distance down the main line of a great railway, a strange-looking elderly man, and one whose dress bespeaks the clergyman, are passing from ward to ward upon a visit. The man with them, in his quiet livery, raises the brass-chained key he carries to open lock after lock—one key for hundreds—and they pass on by sights of the most sorrowful; for they are amongst those of their fellows in whom the light of reason burns but dimly or is extinct. At last they stand by a window looking upon an extensive yard, where some fifty patients clothed in gray serge walk about for exercise—some hurriedly, some talking, some excited, others calm. And now one visitor lays a trembling hand



upon his companion's arm as, nearing the window, comes a portly, gray, smiling man, rolling solemnly along with imposing gait, wearing a stiff white-paper cravat, with a card snuff-box in his hand and a straw-plait chain meandering over his gray serge vest. Quiet and harmless, he goes about the yard feeling the pulses of his fellow-patients, and nods at them and smiles encouragement.

“Is there any prospect of his recovery?” says the clergyman to the warder, who is looking unconcernedly on.

“Whose, sir?” says the attendant. “His? the doctor's? O no, sir, not the least. Stark mad!”

THE END.







